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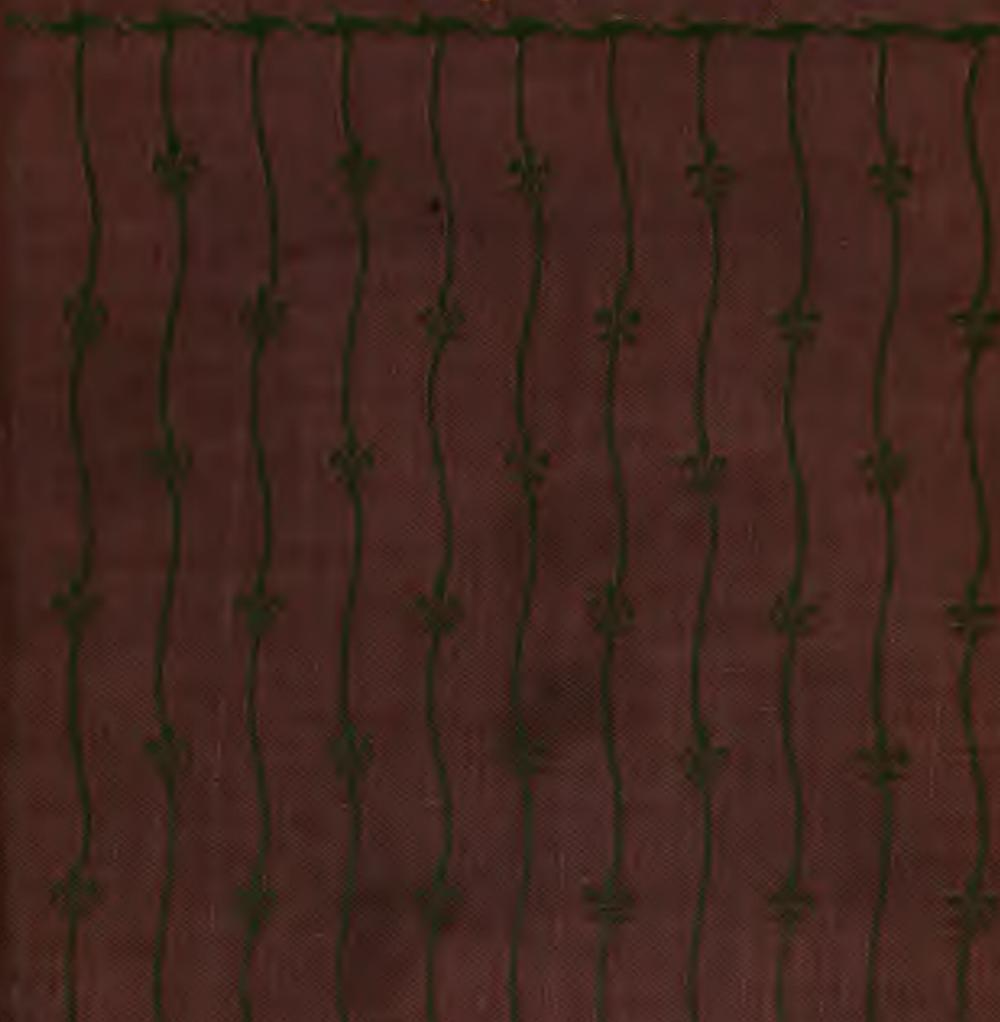
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Sisters

of Women

MARCEL PRÉVOST



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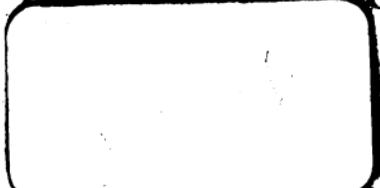


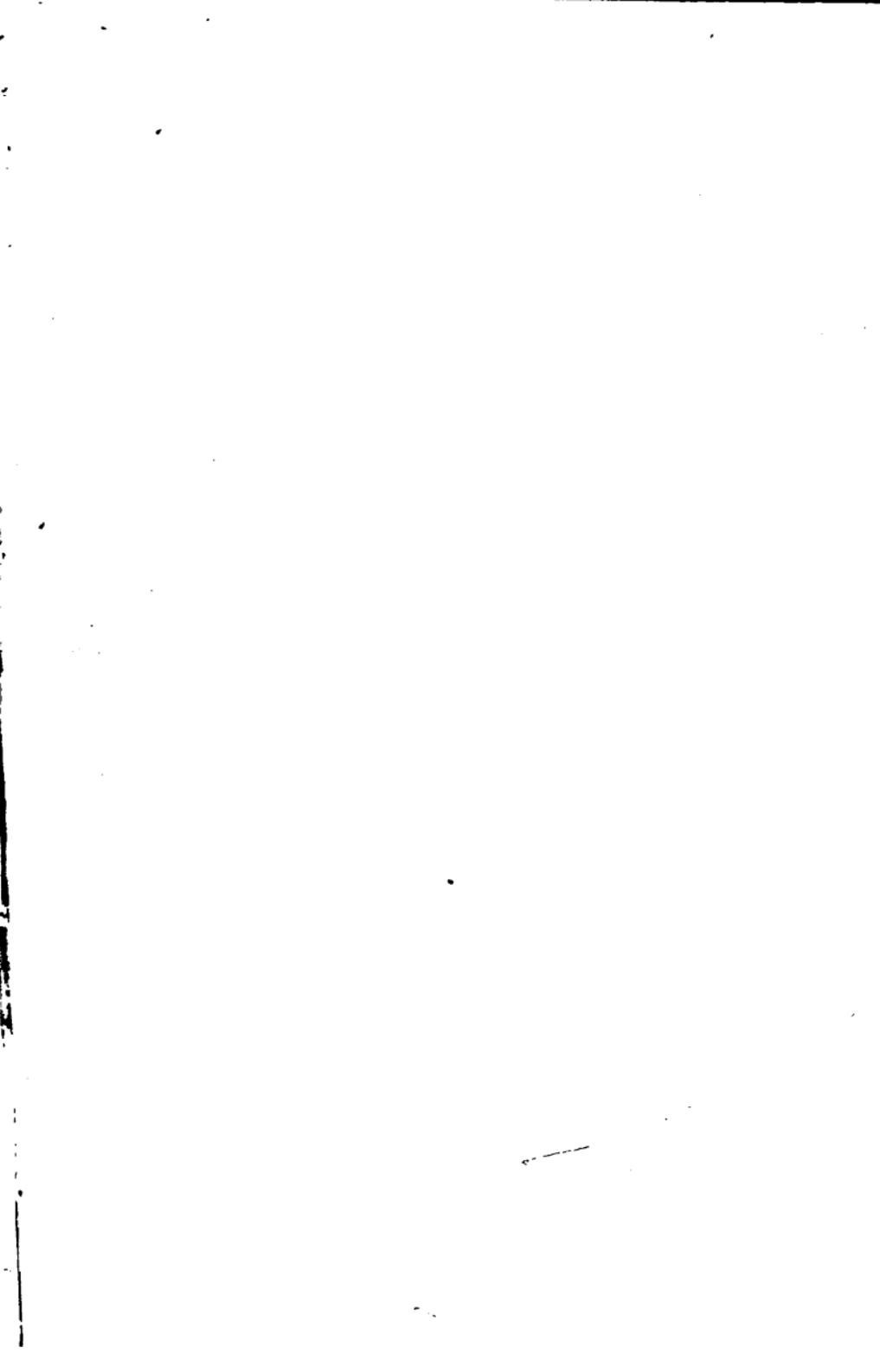
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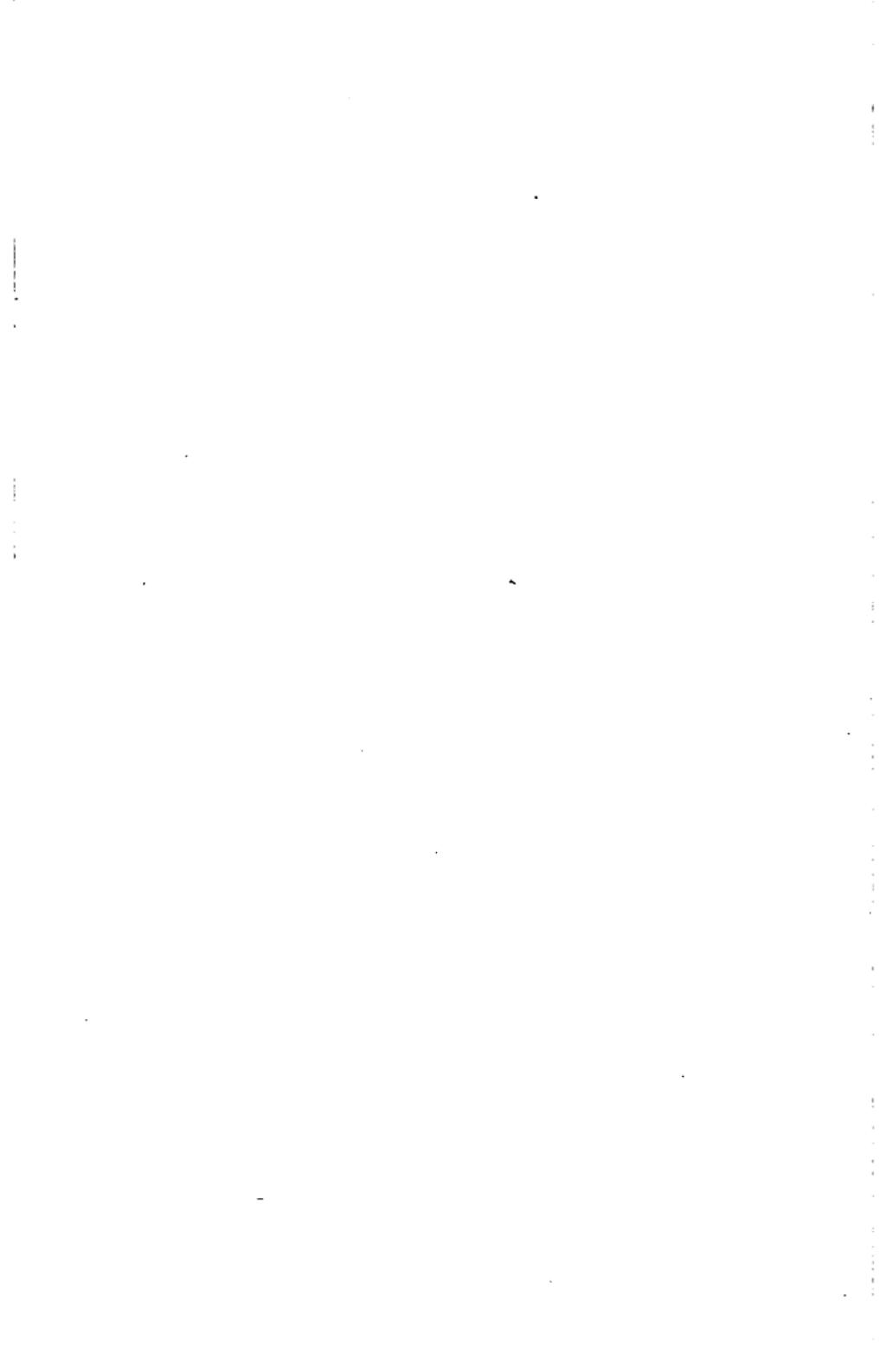
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CLASS OF 1909



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LETTERS OF WOMEN

BY MARCEL PRÉVOST

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LETTERS OF WOMEN

BY

MARCEL PRÉVOST

TRANSLATED FROM THE FIFTIETH THOUSAND BY

ARTHUR HORNBLOW



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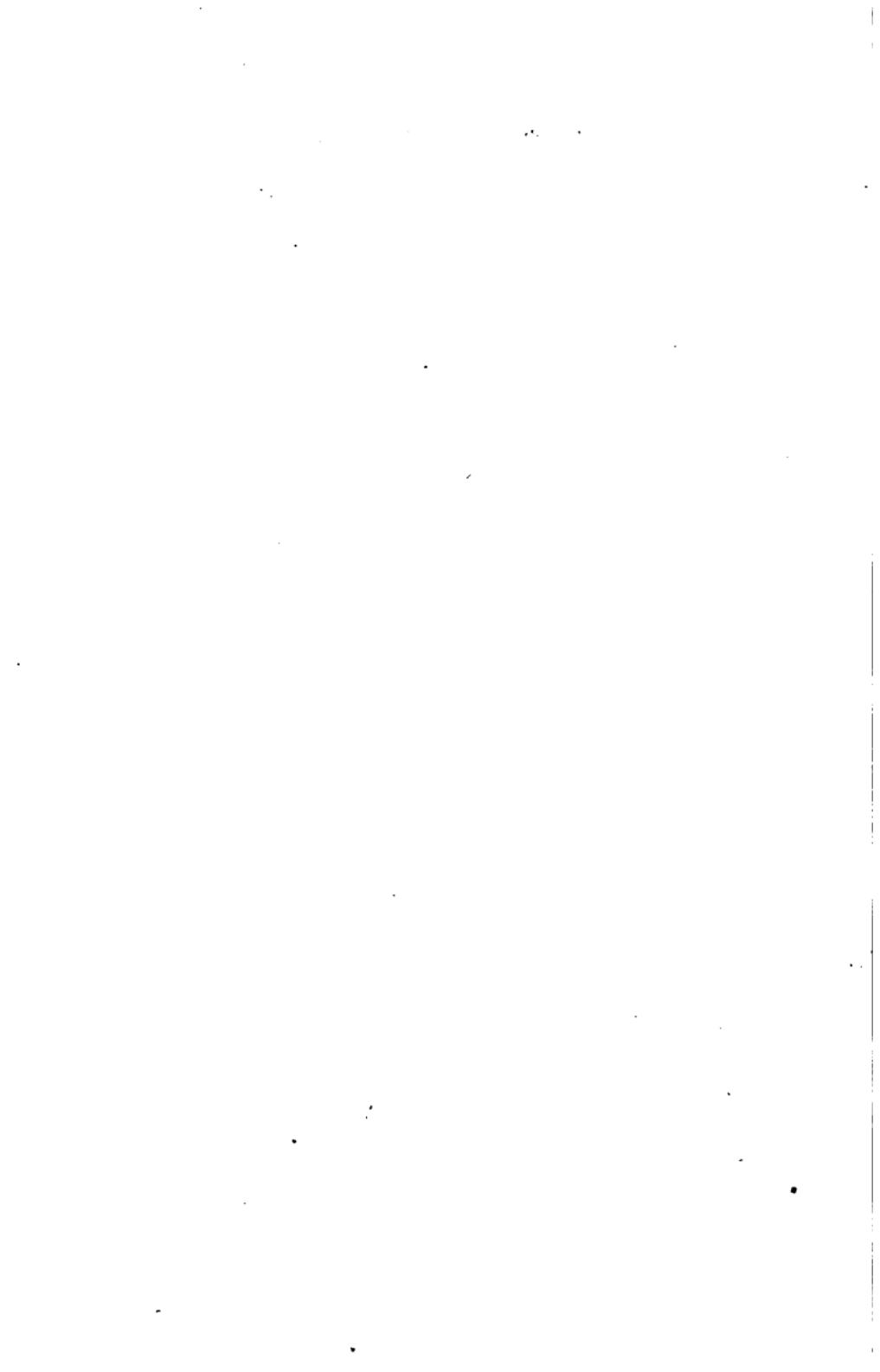
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Morning Letters.

Eleven o'clock, A.M. A small private residence in the Rue Rembrandt, Paris.

Mme. d'Arteny, thirty years of age, and a typical, stout brunette, is seated in her dressing room, in front of a writing table, and is covering a sheet of grayish-blue paper with aristocratically formed letters.

• • • • •

You must not be angry with me if that walk has left me in a rather painful state of mind. Do not misunderstand me, dear friend. The delight of being with you, of walking arm-in-arm with you through the paths of that distant park where, sure of meeting no one we knew, we sought the illusion of being legitimately all in all to each other; your words, too—

for you say such sweet things—your tender words . . . all that intoxicated me and took temporarily from my mind the clear perception of my duties, and it is possible I may have permitted to escape my lips something that resembled a promise. . . . Oh ! however vague that promise, I beseech you to forget it. Since you love me—you said you did, and I believe it—do not take advantage of a moment's weakness. If you saw me now, you would pity me. On my return home I remembered my duties, forgotten during our short walk to the Montsouris observatory. My husband was waiting for me. Noble soul! I should never be able to betray his confidence in me. He told me that he intended to rent from next June a cottage somewhere on the Normandy coast, so I can leave Paris early with the children, as the doctor

advised. He, poor man, will remain here alone, tied down as usual to business, and compelled all summer to lead that odious bachelor life which he dislikes so much. Then, René came in from school and showed me proudly the good marks he had received and he kissed me (a kiss, alas, that awakened remorse!) on the same place where you suddenly placed your lips in the carriage. The governess brought me my little girl, my Valentine, whose delicate health has always worried me. And so I became once more the virtuous wife, loving her husband, loving her children. . . . Ah! now I must admit the wrong I did your affection. I ran and shut myself in my room, and, my eyes filled with tears, I wrote you a note in which I said: "We must not see each other again, Maxime. I feel that I love you too well to remain

much longer—if I continue to think of you and to meet you—the woman that I am, that I want to be, that I must be. Farewell! Do not hate me: that would make me too wretched. I shall never be able to make you happy, so be grateful to me for keeping away from you." Thus I wrote you, Maxime, and that is the letter you should have received instead of this one. After writing it my conscience felt easier and I slept peacefully. But on rereading it this morning, I felt that I love you too much to cause you so much pain. I tore the cruel letter up. I determined to let you be the judge and to put myself entirely in your hands, which I know are those of a devoted friend and a gentleman. But, oh ! Be stronger than I, Maxime. That will power which I myself cannot exert, I demand from you, or rather, I pray for

it in both of us. Answer me at once. I must hear from you. But do not say anything I must not listen to.

The letter continues in this strain for six pages. Mme. d'Arteny finally signs it "Gab"—an abbreviation of her Christian name. She rereads it with an air of satisfaction, slips it into an envelope, on which she writes the following address: M. Maxime Renouard, attaché at the office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, No. 8, rue Montalivet, Paris.

Then, after a few minutes' thought, she takes another sheet of paper and writes with singular rapidity this other letter:

I have received your note and must say I am surprised at your method of procedure. To write to my house, openly, in a strain that would not leave the slightest doubt in the mind of—you know whom—if he read it! And your tone! Really, my dear man, it would be enough to cure me forever of my unfortunate weakness, from which you have profited for three

years, were I not radically cured already. Well, what is done is done. Let us say no more about it. You consent to return my letters, you say, on condition that we see one another "from time to time." "From time to time" is charming. One feels that you do not care to see me very often, but that when you have an afternoon to waste you will condescend! Thanks! You are too good. I do not care to be any one's last resource nor anybody's substitute, no matter who. When a man only wants to see me from time to time, I would prefer he did not see me at all. So, let us break off without any to-do or reciprocal recrimination, if that is possible. You have letters from me; but I hold two confidential notes of yours concerning certain financial enterprises—that you have seemingly forgotten. I can imagine

the faces of your constituents if they read them one day in the papers. Tit for tat, my dear man! Our relations will be clearly defined from now on, and I am quite willing to meet you in society as a friend.

However (except on conditions which I will explain presently), I do not care that our meeting should be soon. I leave Paris early this year; my husband has seized upon Valentine's health as a pretext for sending me to the seaside in June, so he may the sooner resume his annual and edifying bachelor life. I ask you not to come here while I'm still here. Together with the months of absence, that will make almost half a year that we shall not have seen each other, which is sufficient, it seems to me, to relegate the memories we have in common to a legendary state.

One word more, a little business

matter. I know that you like one to be brief and precise, and what I have to say is necessary for the proper winding up of our affairs. I have just received my dressmaker's bill. You will remember you always said to me "I intend to pay for the expensive dresses I ask you to wear. I personally enjoy them and they do me honor." To whom therefore do you think this bill belongs? I leave you to decide. It seems to me we should be able to part in a friendly way, and, to show you that I am reasonable, I will go myself and voluntarily, since you wish to see me, to fetch—*for the last time*—the receipted bill in our dear old nest in the rue Clement-Marot.

Yours, in good fellowship,

GABRIELLE.

(Mme. d'Arteny slips her letter into an envelope, seals it, and writes the address: Baron Silberberg, Deputy, No. 9, Avenue d'Antin, Paris, and rings for her maid.)

Pages from a Diary.

June 10.

Alas, how little is one mistress of one's own heart, how little one knows one's self! Of course, I knew that Pierre's memory could never be entirely effaced from my heart; I loved to persuade myself that there was no crime in continuing to think of him, since he was the living reminder of a misstep taken long ago and which never had and never would be taken again. I even took delight in insisting that it was remorse which had kept this reminiscence alive for ten years or more, haunting and secretly preoccupying me notwithstanding my calm and serene attitude as wife and mother. It was a souvenir of bitter-

ness and anguish which I offered to God in expiation of my sin. And now an unexpected incident discloses the involuntary hypocrisy of my conscience. It has sufficed to hear these words from my husband, "General de Givry is coming on a visit of inspection next week" to open the scar and make the wound more painful than ever. Pierre is coming back! A few days more and I shall see him here, in this same town where I have remained ever since his departure eleven years ago. In all that time I have never forgotten him for a single day, and now I know that I have been living in expectation of his return.

Extraordinary emotion rises in my throat when I think of seeing him again. Ah, what an unworthy wife and mother I am! My emotion does not come from shame, or remorse, or

fright. It is the same emotion that I used to feel years ago when I met Captain de Givry in a drawing room, or when I met him in the street, gray with dust, accompanying his men to the barracks after a morning march.

I know the real name of the emotion I feel. But I do not dare confess what it is.

June 16.

How commonplace and humdrum my life has been ever since then! Is it surprising if, in this calm existence without incident, my heart has remained the same and is as young as ever in spite of the years that have rolled by?

For eleven long years all my afternoons have been passed in precisely the same manner—near the window of my bedroom which looks out upon

the deserted Esplanade. I have spent my time in working and reading. Sometimes I receive the visits of a few friends, always the same. At the same time each day my husband comes to my room on his return from headquarters, and kisses me on the brow. As in the days when Pierre de Givry loved me, the house is empty, for my two sons, born during his absence, are away at school.

And the room is the same, too. It has been my wish that not a piece of furniture, not a hanging be changed. As I occupy it each day for many hours, I thought I could dream better amid the familiar surroundings. Here is the door through which he entered the evening before his departure, the chair on which he sat, facing me, seated in this very rocking chair. A slight flush was on his pale cheeks. He was so moved

that his dear voice trembled as he spoke.

"I have come to say good-by. I start to-morrow."

A few moments ago, leaning back in my rocker with my eyes closed, I saw that scene as though it had taken place only yesterday. Once more I felt the shock of those cruel words and once more my heart was seized by a mortal chill. I felt Pierre again at my feet speaking with impassioned tenderness, beseeching me to leave everything to follow him. I felt the soft touch of his hands, the pressure of his lips.

Oh, my God, make me strong ! When I am again in his presence, what will become of me ?

Same date. Evening.

The past torments me now and is about to conquer me. I am weary of resisting. I sink back in the recollection of my error and it is fearfully sweet. . . . Yes, I confess it to myself now, all these years I have not once ceased to adore him under the mask of remorse. He has held me only once in his arms, it is true, and immediately afterwards we were torn away from each other; but since then each day, each night I have belonged to him. And from afar, to the extreme end of France or farther, away beyond the ocean my thoughts have followed and watched over him. His promotions, his special mentions in the official dispatches during the campaign in Asia, where he won glory—all this success I have shared. The only happiness

of the poor lonely woman, buried in this quiet country town, has been to dream of the absent.

To-day I asked myself: "Why did I never write to him?" Ah! Many a time I began a letter to him. Just a few lines, "Think of me. I cannot forget you." But I always tore up the besmirched and tear-stained paper. "What's the good?" I said to myself. "Our lives have been separated. We shall never meet again. All we have the right to do is to think of each other, I with remorse, he perhaps with affection." I was sure he would never forget me. His love for me had been too intense for that.

Even the romantic side of that sudden possession, without a morrow, had surely guaranteed my memory in his heart.

The best proof is that brilliant, celebrated, adulated as he has since

become, he has never married. Dear, faithful lover!

June 18.

He will arrive to-morrow. He will spend only one day here. The inspection will be over at noon. He will take lunch with the staff and in the evening he will dine at the Préfecture. After the dinner there is to be a reception, and I shall see him then.

Now that the moment of the meeting draws near I am becoming uneasy.

Pierre has preserved in his memory the image of a young woman of twenty-five. To-day I am nearly forty. What a pity to destroy my young image in his memory, to have to replace it by the older one of to-day!

I have looked in the family album for a portrait of myself taken at that time, and in front of the mirror I compared it to what I am now. I haven't changed much assuredly, particularly as I still do my hair as I did then. No, I haven't changed—the same features, the same figure, the same style of dressing, and yet, nevertheless, I am visibly ten years older. I have tried to solve the mystery of this premature aging. It's the flesh of my face, I think, which, although it has still the same form, seems another substance to what it did then, less solid, less vivacious. And my eyes are also ten years older.

I don't know now whether I shall be happy or sad on seeing Pierre again.

June 19.

It is ten o'clock, and I am about to start for the Préfecture. I do not dare think of what will happen. Suppose Pierre asks me, as he did before, to go away with him? My life would be ruined and every one would despise me. But it would be a new life—a life with him—the man for whom alone I have lived during these past ten years. What does the contempt of the world matter to me?

Oh, my God! give me strength.

• • • • •

Same date. Night.

They brought me back in a carriage, carried me to my room and put me to bed after I recovered conscious-

ness. I have had to submit to the frightened care of my husband and servants. At last I am alone.

It seems to me that I have just been wrecked, drowned, that they have rescued me from the water too late and that I am slowly dying.

As a sort of testament of my heart I want to write down all that happened this evening.

I had barely entered the salon at the Préfecture when I saw and recognized him. He was leaning against a chimney mantel, chatting and laughing with the Préfect and his staff. He has not changed in the least! He is still young and handsome; only his hair has turned quite gray.

Ah! how I should have liked to throw myself on his decoration-covered breast and murmur "It's I! I love you still. Do you know me?"

But before so many people I felt

too disturbed even to consent to an introduction. I went to sit with some friends, and while pretending to be engrossed in the general conversation, I watched him. All the women who arrived were introduced to the lion of the evening, and he replied to their mute homage with a slight smile of indifference. However, he paid some attention to little Mme. Dauzat, who was outrageously décolleté as usual.

Suddenly his eyes fell on me and he began to stare. I felt faint, yet I had the strength not to avoid his gaze. For a few seconds he looked at me in an absent-minded kind of way. Then he turned round and, perfectly calm, went on chatting.

Was it possible that he did not recognize me? "No," I said to myself, "he looked at me without seeing me. Yet he must have known I was

there." I suffered horribly for a moment. The Director of the Customs came up to me and gossiped in his usual tiresome way. I hardly listened to him. I saw General de Givry leave the mantel and go off in the direction of the card rooms. I longed to be alone.

I succeeded only an hour later. I asked one of my husband's sub-lieutenants to escort me out on the terrace, and told him to leave me alone as I had a headache, which the cooler air might dispel. A presentiment told me that Pierre would come that way. . . . A few seconds later I heard his voice in the drawing room which I had just quitted. He was talking to Julie Dauzat.

As long as I live I shall remember every word of that conversation.

"Was this a slow place when you were here before, General?" smirked

Julie affectedly. "You were then only a captain, I believe."

"Yes," replied Pierre. "Garrison life is not very exhilarating at any time. Yet I managed to amuse myself. I was interested in my work, and there were other distractions too."

"You mean women, of course. Were you always the same Don Juan as now?"

"Oh, I am very serious nowadays. The woman who can make me forget my age now (he kissed Julie's hand) must be a ravishing creature indeed. When I was a captain I was less exacting. Altogether, I can't say the time weighed very heavily on my hands."

"Oh, General!" exclaimed Mme. Dauzat, please tell me the names of your conquests. I will be so discreet. It would amuse me to know the little secrets of some of our middle-aged dowagers."

" You may believe me if you like," replied Pierre, " but it would be a difficult task. Just now I passed in review all your dowagers, as you term them, and I did not recognize a single face. Yet, I thought to myself, there must be four or five here whom I used to know pretty well."

" What are their names, General? You must remember some of them."

Pierre thought a moment.

" No, on my honor," he replied. " The devil take me if I can recall a single one. In fact, not one of my adventures was very important. And, besides, you know, madame, the love affairs of a soldier: ' Out of sight, out of mind! '"

And he hummed the air:

" Soldier, soldier, mount your steed ;
Bid farewell to your girl !
There are plenty more fish in the sea !"
etc., etc.

It was at that moment that I fainted.

Why did I ever come to again?

Why cannot I die?

The Compact.

THE COMTESSE CLOTILDE D'ARMIN-
GES TO MADEMOISELLE ZABEL
SIVRY OF THE BOUFFES-PARISIENS.

Sunday.

Mademoiselle:

You will doubtless be more than surprised at receiving a letter from me. Although we know each other by sight and name (and for cause), I confess that I never dreamed that we should ever correspond. You must excuse me, as the fault is not mine, but Count Maxime's, my husband and your—friend. For two days, and as many nights, M. d'Arminges has not

been home. Of course, he is free to seek distraction where he pleases and as he pleases. I would be the last in the world to keep watch on his movements. But so prolonged an absence has made me very uneasy. The count is always considerate; if he has not sent me word, it is because he has been unable to do so. Now, you doubtless know that M. d'Arminges, who is no longer young, is subject to attacks of cardiac failure that have the effect of depriving him, often for hours, of all movement, and even of all appearance of life. These periods of coma require particular care and treatment by a specialist. He may have been overcome by such an attack while out somewhere. That is what I fear.

My husband left me on Friday evening, at his usual club time. It is

now Sunday night and he is still absent. I have had inquiries made at his club; he was not seen there on Friday nor has he been seen since then. I even took the liberty to send my confidential maid to make inquiries of your janitor, mademoiselle; they told her that M. d'Arminges had not been there for two days. However, before going to the police, which is repugnant to me, I thought it better to write to you personally. I trust you will appreciate the circumstances that force me to this step, and that you will be good enough, that is if you know, to tell me where the count is, or at least if he is safe and in good health.

Believe me, mademoiselle, yours very sincerely,

COUNTESS D'ARMINGES.

MADEMOISELLE ZABEL SIVRY TO
MADAME LA COMTESSE D'ARMINGES.

Madame:

If you saw Count Maxime on Friday evening, you are more favored than I, for I have had neither a visit from, nor news of, him since Thursday afternoon. That day we went to Fontana's together to buy a few trifles, and while there he bought a diamond butterfly, which he intended for you, I believe; he asked me to help him select it, and I did so to the best of my ability. This is all the information I can give you. I, too, am uneasy, being hardly accustomed to such a long absence and such silence, and I dread, as you do, that what you mention might have happened to him. Naturally, I should never have taken

the liberty of writing to you first; I confess, however, that I too have had inquiries made, as discreetly as possible, at your residence. May I hope, madame, that should you obtain news of M. d'Arminges, and if the count is unable to send me word personally, you will be good enough to allay my anxiety? On my side, I will inform you at once directly I learn anything.

Believe me, madame, yours very obediently,

ZABEL S—.

COUNTESS D'ARMINGES TO MADE-
MOISELLE SIVRY.

Very well, mademoiselle, it is agreed. Whichever of us two receives the first news, she will inform

the other. Up to the present I have heard nothing.

P. S.—Thanks for having helped the count in his purchase at Fontana's. The butterfly is beautiful and in perfect taste.

MADEMOISELLE SIVRY TO MADAME
D'ARMINGES.

Monday.

Madame:

There is no further reason for anxiety. The count is all right. While we were worrying concerning his health and his fate he was simply deceiving *us*. But Providence has punished him. Here is the story in a few words:

On Friday evening, on leaving you, M. d'Arminges did not go to his club. He went to meet one of his friends, M. Jules Clair, a broker, who took him to—Bellevue. Yes, madame, to Bellevue, near Paris. There, close to the woods, is an unpretentious-looking villa, and in the villa a foreign lady, a Spaniard they say, and two young girls—her daughters, she says. All three are very hospitable, especially if their guests are rich and well born, like M. d'Arminges. I do not know with what kind of amusement they entertained the two men, but the count was suddenly stricken by one of those attacks that you dreaded. Imagine the fright of the mistress of the house, and the embarrassment of Jules Clair, whose conscience was anything but easy. A doctor was called, who said: "There is nothing to be done. Watch and wait." Jules

Clair was in a dilemma. He did not dare write to you, and so he remained faithfully near his friend, always hoping that the count would come to. But the days passed. The poor broker, distracted, foresaw the consequence of the adventure, your anxiety, police investigation. Then, by a happy thought, he wrote me the entire story.

So now, madame, you know as much as I do. Of course your first impulse will be to hasten to the house at Bellevue. Will you permit me to make a respectful suggestion? Do not go to Bellevue; leave that to me. It would compromise you to go there. Unfortunately for me, I know that class of people better than you. I know the way one must talk to them. The matter, believe me, will be quickly and safely settled. I see also another advantage in your not going. When I have the count sent home to you,

you may seem to be ignorant of his adventure, and affect to believe that he was merely taken ill at my house. It seems to me that that would be more agreeable to you and to him.

I await your instructions, of course, and I beg you will accept, madame, the assurance of my respectful regard.

ZABEL S—.

COUNTESS D'ARMINGES TO MADEMOISELLE SIVRY.

(*Telegram.*)

You are quite right, mademoiselle. I place the matter in your hands, and thank you.

Yours gratefully,
COUNTESS D'ARMINGES.

COUNTESS D'ARMINGES TO MADEMOISELLE SIVRY.

Tuesday morning.

All goes well. The count, after passing a few hours in his room, and, thanks to the attentions of his own medical man, has completely recovered his senses. He is up, and has already eaten this morning, a little ashamed of his adventure. But I was good, and made no allusion either to Bellevue or to the Spaniards. It is tacitly understood between us that the attack took place at your house.

And now that we are both easy again, mademoiselle, I wish to thank you for the discretion, tact, and devotion you have shown throughout this affair. I already knew (as every one in Paris knows) that you are a very

charming woman and highly praised as an artiste, but permit me to be agreeably surprised at encountering in the theatrical world, of which we hear so much that is bad, a delicacy and tact that I should have vainly sought in my own set.

Such kindness, assuredly, cannot be repaid, and I mean to remain your debtor. Allow me, however, as a souvenir of our mutual anxiety, to offer you the butterfly (symbolical, alas!) which the count gave me last week.

You selected it; therefore it pleases you, and I don't think you will refuse to accept a jewel that I have worn.

I will, myself, take it to your house this afternoon, at about three o'clock. And if you are in, I shall have great pleasure in meeting you.

Yours very sincerely,
COUNTESS D'ARMINGES.

P. S.—I shall take advantage of the opportunity to ask you for the address of your dressmaker. Your mantles and bonnets are the admiration of every one, and neither Reboux nor Virot knows who works for you. You will tell me, I hope. We may surely have a dressmaker in common, since . . . But I was about to write an impropriety.

The Rival.

June 18.

Up to the time of Juliette's appearance I had never been jealous of any of the women whom Maurice courted, nor of his success in society, nor of his affairs with actresses, nor of his conquests with the women of every other trade-mark. Young married women and young girls, more or less emancipated, ran after him, attracted like larks by the reflection of his freshly acquired reputation, by his fine figure and princely airs. I was not jealous; I was even proud. All this homage was in a way paid to me. I had made this handsome artist, so quickly celebrated, with my flesh and blood; to

console my early widowhood I had desired no other love than his. Since I had undergone so many privations, renounced so much in order to raise and educate him, his glory was my work as well as his beauty. And, besides, my cherished painter was so grateful, so affectionate to his old mother. Even before everybody he always called me "Mother!" so nicely, and that big fellow, whose independence no other master had ever been able to check, always showed himself obedient to my wishes. Ah! the women could run after him, give themselves to him, get their names coupled with his. I knew well that they were but diversion for his brain and that he changed them at pleasure, as he would change a horse for a ride in the Bois. The only woman in his life, the real counsellor, confidant, and refuge, was his mother.

He met this Juliette in those bourgeois circles that love to come in contact with artists. She was an unmarried woman, no longer very young, and had already had a great many flirtations; that is to say, she had tried for and missed a great many marriages. She was pretty, I must admit. Titian-colored hair, skin the color of bran, so fine and delicate that one was afraid a kiss would tear it; and eyes of a singular green, very deep, very humid, sea-grass green, if one may so express one's self. She flirted with Maurice as with every other man, and Maurice himself courted her passionately, as he usually did every woman who attracted him, for he always imagined each time, during the first six weeks, that he had found the grand passion. I was without anxiety. I knew how long such grand passions last. Yet, when he painted Juliette's

pale, and left the house and remained away until the evening. When he came in he kissed me and said : "Never speak again, mother, as you did this morning. All those lies that they have told you are unworthy of you. Juliette merits my love, and she loves me. Do not force me to choose between her and you."

They were married. I could not take it upon myself to live with them, although Juliette offered to submit to our living together. No, I did not wish to do so; I could not. I withdrew to a little house near Paris, in which I installed myself with two servants. Maurice came to see me from time to time; on Sundays he dined with me. I never met my daughter-in-law except when I myself went to Paris.

Thus I passed two sad years, the saddest of my life, that aged me as ten

years would have done. No deceived wife, no abandoned mistress has ever been as jealous as I. She was the companion, the confidant, the refuge, all that I had been ; she was the woman of his life, and I had gone out of his life. The first year of his marriage he did not exhibit any pictures; he accomplished nothing. Would any one believe that I was glad of it, and that I said to myself, "she prevents him from working," with a certain contentment? But the following year he triumphed with his *Death of Manon*, and took the prize of the Salon. This success made me wretched, I who previously had lived but of his success. It was because I recognized Manon's sinuous body, her auburn locks, the sea-grass green eyes.

He never forgot me ; he always came to see his old mother; and gradually it seemed to me that he came

oftener, and that he remained longer. One would think that he had something to confide to me, but that he dared not, and that he suffered in consequence. The poor boy suffered, and I, who adored him, guessed the cause of his suffering, and yet did not wish him to confide in me. I wanted him to drink his sorrow to the dregs, all alone, without consolation or sympathy, so that he might afterward come back to me as I wanted him to—wounded and heart-broken—that I might cure him, and that he should owe me his life. I began now to cease hating this Juliette, since she was paining him. At the time of their honeymoon I had desired to know nothing of their life. Now I interested myself in it more frequently: I took notice. I at once understood everything. My daughter-in-law had not a lover yet, but

thoughts of another man had awakened in her impure mind. I was present at one of their receptions, and I guessed who the man was.

I returned to my little suburban house perfectly reassured, full of hope for the future; and when, six weeks later, my poor, loved Maurice came and threw himself in my arms, sobbing and crushed, furious and enraged against the woman who was already beyond his reach, I pressed him to my heart, thanking God, who had returned him to me. All my torments were forgotten. He had come back to me; my rival was vanquished.

After the Transgression.

It is ten o'clock at night.

A young woman of about twenty-five, Mme. de Robertier, is alone in her bedroom, seated at a small English mahogany desk, lighted by a small lamp. A sealed letter is lying before her; the long mauve envelope as yet bears no superscription.

Mme. de Robertier is partially disrobed, which is marvellously becoming to her. She is a small and somewhat pronounced blonde.

She has been weeping a great deal, and her eyelids and cheeks bear the trace of tears.

MME. DE ROBERTIER (*meditating*).

If I had a little courage, any real spirit, I would write and tell my husband the truth. I would say to him: "There—I am a wretch—unworthy of you. Because your business affairs, the business that interests us both equally, has kept you far away from me, I have deceived you; I have

allowed a man to make love to me. And what a man! A brainless fop, a perfect idiot. It is true he has handsome black eyes and the hands of a prince. He also bears a great name, Marquis de Hermoso. But that is certainly no reason for betraying, after two years of a happy wedded life, you who love me, you whom I love. For I love you, alas! Yes, Jean, I love you, particularly now—much more than that insipid de Hermoso, who was making love to me this evening, from five to seven, at his house in the Rue de la Baume."

(Reflux of recollections. Mme. de Robertier loses the thread of her thoughts for an instant and then picks them up again.)

That is what I should write to M. de Robertier, if I had any self-respect.

It would be honest, loyal, and (*a pause*) absurd. For, after all, the worst thing that can happen to a husband in such an affair is for him to hear about it. To-day, from five to seven, M. de Robertier was just as peaceful, just as happy as on other days.

I cannot reasonably be expected to make my husband unhappy by an excess of loyalty. Presently I will write Jean a nice affectionate letter—I will be even a little passionate (he loves to get passionate letters when he's far away from me). And the same post shall take to de Hermoso this little note, which I wrote directly I left his house.

My husband will receive his letter the day after to-morrow. Hermoso will get his to-morrow. They will take it to him in bed, just at noon. It will be a pleasant awakening for him.

I must reread it.

(She tears open the envelope, unfolds the letter, and reads it in a whisper.)

“ Monsieur:

“ You have shamefully abused the confidence placed in you by a good woman. When I went to your house I thought, according to your promise, that it was simply to examine your bric-à-brac and then to leave. After what has occurred you will understand that I cannot ever see you again. But I want you to distinctly understand that I adore my husband and that I feel for you the most profound contempt.

“ JACQUELINE.”

(She meditates for a moment, still holding the note in her hand.)

It's very imprudent writing to that man in this fashion. He need only

show it at the club. No one could mistake its meaning. And besides (*an imperceptible smile*) the phrase "bric-à-brac" is not a very happy one. I was so agitated. . . . But the word "contempt" is perfect.

(She tears up the letter and begins another, taking care to disguise her writing.)

"Monsieur:

"You have broken your word. I did what I have done because I was sure you would conduct yourself like a gentleman. You have cruelly undeceived me. Henceforth you will understand that it will be impossible for me to see you again. But I want you to distinctly understand that I adore my husband and that I feel for you the most profound contempt.

"J."

(She meditates again.)

That is not so compromising—but, after all, it is rather silly. “I did what I have done.” That doesn’t mean anything. Yes, it’s decidedly clumsy. And Hermoso used to be in love with Mme. Lescoevre, who writes so well. No, it won’t do yet.

(She tears up the letter and begins another.)

“ Monsieur:

“ I ask you as a favor to efface from your memory, as I have done from mine, what took place to-day. It is to your honor as a gentleman that I appeal. All is ended and forgotten, I hope. I adore my husband and I feel for you——”

(She stops.)

No. If I write in that tone I cannot tell him that I feel the most pro-

found contempt for him. Three lines higher up I call him a gentleman. It would be well if I said simply: "I adore my husband."

That's better! But to say "I adore my husband" the day after—He'll surely laugh. And, after all, who can blame him? Have I really anything to reproach him with? He only did what every man would do. I accepted an invitation to his house, under the pretext of seeing his bric-à-brac—but, to be frank, I knew well enough that he would not keep as calm as if he were a guide in a museum. Oh! I made sure I could defend myself, and resist. And even now I do not know how it happened . . . (*a petulant motion*). Besides, it was Jean's fault. He has no business to leave me alone so long.

(She meditates again.)

Poor Jean ! So far away and thinking of me. He little suspects ! Oh ! how I will love him when he comes back !

(She destroys the letter that she has just written, and begins once more.)

“ Monsieur :

“ I ask you as a favor to efface to-day from your memory, as I shall do from mine. All must be ended and forgotten. On these conditions I will retain a very sad remembrance of you, but without hate and without contempt.

“ J.”

(She reads it over.)

That is excellent. Calm, dignified, and sad. And, besides, it will not hurt the poor man’s feelings so much.

To tell the truth, I did encourage him a little.

Now, shall I send this to him to-night? All the post-offices are closed. Betsy will see the address, and gossip about it in the kitchen. It would be better if I post it myself to-morrow morning as I go to the Louvre. So now I'll go to bed.

(She undresses, says her prayers, and gets into bed. Eight hours' sound sleep. About half-past nine next morning Betsy enters her mistress's room.)

MME. DE ROBERTIER (*awaking*).

“ Well? what is it? ”

BETSY.

“ A large basket of flowers, madame! ”

MME. DE ROBERTIER (*slowly recovering her wits*).

“Flowers? Oh, yes. . . . I know what it is. . . . Open the shutters and bring them in.”

(*Betsy obeys. The basket is full of fine red and white roses. Betsy exits.*)

MME. DE ROBERTIER.

“What a sweet thought! . . . the day after, when I wake. Poor man! . . . And I had written him such a nasty letter too!”

(*She goes to the mahogany desk, opens her letter written the evening before, and rereads it. She walks up and down the room for a few minutes. She stops before the cheval glass, and finds with satisfaction that her sleep*

(has restored the freshness of her complexion. She returns to the desk, and crumples up the letter.)

“No, I cannot send him that after those flowers.”

(She sits down and rapidly writes the following.)

“Thank you so much. I am very sad. I would like to forget yesterday. I cannot. Pity me!

“J.”

(Rereads it.)

That's very nice, and just as dignified as the other. I will post it on my way to the Louvre.

(She rings for Betsy, and proceeds to dress herself.)

My Old Friend.

MME. DE LANGALLERY TO MONSIEUR
THE ABBÉ LE MOTHEUX, AL-
MONER AT THE CONVENT OF THE
MADONNA, AT PARIS.

These recent days of Lent, my dear Abbé, plunge me into frightful ill-humor, and I know no one but you with whom I am in a fit condition to chat. My husband is away at the military manœuvres near Poitou, and Châtellerault is full of officers' widows — eight-day widows. Our widowhood, too, is aggravated by the miserable weather. I do not know how the barometer is treating you in Paris, or if the sun is causing the lilacs to blossom in my dear old Convent of the Madonna. Here, for the past fortnight, we breathe fog and wade in

mud. Then, there is the usual Easter cleaning, the general cleaning of one's conscience, that must be done. One examines one's conduct. We see we are not worth a sou more than last year, which is maddening, or even that we are worth a few sous less, which is distressing. All the parasitic growths of egotism, calumny, laziness, gluttony, and coquetry that we had at heart have thrived, grown, and multiplied. Ah ! my good father, how lucky it is I do not confess any more to you ! What a severe little sermon you would give me !

I say how lucky . . . and I think the contrary. Even at the cost of his severe sermon, I would willingly have the benefit of Abbé Le Motheux' kindly counsels. Our curates here are excellent men, but they are all alike, without tact or delicacy, children of rustics ravished by the

seminary from the farm. Although I was born here, I became too Parisianized at the convent, and during my vacations spent at my Aunt Hortisol's house, to think or speak as they do. I can hear you grumble, "Parisianized! Parisianized! . . . such ideas! That giddy little Roberte feels very important now because she knows something about the Obelisque and Pantheon." No, dear Abbé, I do not feel important. I am only an insignificant, little being, I know; but, all the same, there are little secrets in my heart that I cannot confide to my confessor here any more than I could offer him some Saxony bric-à-brac, which he would not appreciate, but would quickly break between his coarse, peasant fingers. We gave you Saxony ware, at times, for your birthday, yet you did not break it, but prized it at its full value.

All this verbiage is to explain to you that there is at the bottom of the heart of this Parisianized little provincial girl, or of the Parisienne exiled to the provinces, as you choose, a certain strange and delicate feeling of remorse, so delicate and strange that you alone in all the world may hear what it is. One must have known what a scrupulous little thing I was at the convent to understand the obstinate unrest, the torment of soul in which it has kept me, for nearly a month past. In fact, it were better to tell you all the particulars. So, once more, have the patience to hear me out. Really, it will be a charity.

I do not know if, while at the Madonna, I ever told you about "my old friend." Perhaps I did, because I told you all that passed through my mind. Perhaps not, because I loved

“my old friend” with the careless egotism that children show to old people, and I confess that I did not often dream of him. This old friend was in his fiftieth year when I came into the world. My thoughts of him had been only those of a somewhat coquettish friendship. But I believe that I held a prominent place in the last years of his life.

His name was Baron Delaborde, and he was the son of a courtier of Charles X., whom he followed into exile. Later he won the favor of Napoleon III., and for some time was known as one of the gayest men of the Compiègne set. After the war he retired to Châtellerault, his birthplace, where, although over fifty, he still found a way to ravage two or three country homes. These details are hardly calculated to give you a very good opinion of my old friend, but I

hasten to add that he possessed every virtue excepting *that* one which he lacked, and, moreover, that he died a good and repentant Christian. Would you be more severe than the Great Judge?

I met Baron Delaborde while still a child, when he was still handsome and seductive, and when both his face and figure still showed that he had merited his reputation. He was slender and supple, and when seen from the back barely seemed thirty. His hair was perfectly white, and shamed by its abundance the early baldness of many younger men, nor was there a single flaw or a speck of gold in his teeth. His entire person revealed the excessive refinement that men object to in those men whom women have much loved.

He lived on the Cours de Blossac, in a gray stone, aristocratic-looking

house that contrasted strangely with the more commonplace white cottages of the town. He dwelt there alone with a relative reduced in circumstances, and who, his junior by many years, seemed like his mother.

There was such an aureole about his name and his past that, bachelor as he was, he could give in his own house dinners and balls at which the most strait-laced and arrogant people of the little provincial town were eager to be present. Married women, young girls, and old women spared no effort to secure invitations. The baron knew so well how to say to each what flattered her most, and to pay attention to his least important guest with an almost tender eagerness that caused the simple to think, "The baron must be in love with me!" As regards myself, I was just nine years old when he began to call me "Made-

moiselle," and treat me with every mark of admiring respect, and, on my birthday, instead of buying me toys, he gave me flowers as he would a grown woman. Imagine if he won my heart! To Baron Delaborde, then fifty years old, my first coquettish addresses. It was he who first made me acquainted with that forbidden—and delightful—pleasure of being courted. I let people kiss me on the cheeks or on the forehead as often as they liked. He alone thought of kissing my hands, and chose for that deferential caress the moments when we were entirely alone. That disturbed me greatly. My confessor in those days must have had a good laugh when I told him, with choking emotion that "I had permitted a gentleman to kiss my hands."

This harmless intrigue lasted nearly four years, up to the time I was

sent to the Madonna, and where I made your acquaintance, my dear Abbé. I must say, to my shame, that the old friend was very soon forgotten. Paris, even when seen through the tall elms of a convent, soon changes the hearts of country girls. Twice a month, without counting the short holidays, I went to my Aunt Hortisol's house, and there I met men nearer my own age. They were certainly less courteous, less gallant, and often less witty than the baron ; but they had the enormous advantage over him of being young, and I noticed and began to envy the homage they paid to married women and young girls—homage that they neglected entirely to pay to me. And so when the long vacations came, and I returned to Châtellerault, my old friend's charms seemed to me somewhat faded.

The impression I made on him was, I think, quite the opposite. I was at the age when the young girl blossoms into early womanhood, and he gave me to understand that the transformation was a happy one. He had not aged himself. He was the same stately old man with the silky, white hair, clean-shaven mouth and chin, bright eyes, red lips, and white teeth. He was still the most elegant, the most witty, and the most gallant man of our little town. But what of that? I had ceased to be a child, and I had seen Paris.

To celebrate my return, the baron gave a garden party which Châtellerault still talks about. There was a drawing-room comedy, dancing, and supper, and the garden was illuminated by Japanese lanterns; in fact they did everything. Do not scold, my dear Abbé, if I confess that I had

great success and that it gave me the keenest pleasure. At my aunt's in Paris I was a fifteen-year-old school-girl of no importance whatsoever, but at Châtellerault I had returned aureoled with the prestige of my Parisian education, and I had also learned, thanks to my Parisian companions of the Madonna, how to dress, arrange my hair, and beautify my person. I was so courted that all the women at once detested me and began to make scandal. The officers of the garrison were, of course, incorrigible flirts. There were about twenty of them, infantry and artillery both, and every woman and girl in Châtellerault set her cap at each. The officers dangled after me the whole evening, and I let myself be courted, surprised, and delighted. I loved them all a little, it seemed to me. There was one particularly, a lieutenant, whose blond

hair curled naturally in spite of his efforts with the brush to keep it straight, and whose eyes looked like drops of coffee. I chose him the most frequently during the cotillion. I really believe that my old friend—who did not dance—noticed it, for at supper (where he had placed me on his right to my great embarrassment) he was most zealous in telling me that Lieutenant Desfeuille's conduct was most reprehensible, that he had caused trouble in family circles and was particularly compromising with young girls—to all of which I was perfectly indifferent.

Ever after that memorable evening a change occurred in the relations between my old friend and myself—but a change of which I alone was conscious: I no longer took him seriously. Of course I liked him just the same; his attentions flattered me, and

I should have missed them had they not been paid to me, and to have seen them extended to another would have made me jealous. But when I recall the state of my heart at sixteen, I remember that I began to enact a perpetual comedy before the baron. He no longer controlled me; it was I who led him as by a string and kept him on the alert. I was incredibly coquettish with him, yielding, refusing, pouting, cajoling, amused at his jealousy. Do not think, however, that this was precocious cruelty on my part. I should have been greatly grieved to have caused my old friend pain, and of this I gave good proof later. Moreover, he did not suffer at all; I even believe that the old-time courtier's soul was rejuvenated by that youthful intrigue, and in fact I allowed him much more than in the past, when he intimidated me and

amused himself with me as a cat does with a mouse. What great pleasure is there, I ask you, to kiss in secret the hand of a little girl whose forehead one can kiss openly? As I was now almost a young woman, no one kissed me any more. To touch the tips of my fingers was a great favor, a token of affection and friendship. I pretended to attach an enormous importance to it, and I only surrendered "my beautiful hand" after long pleading. It was again in play, the sport of the cat and the mouse; but the cat, old and disabled, became the plaything of the emboldened and rather pervert mouse.

The vacations passed, then another year, then again other vacations, with other years. That stay at the Madonna, the visits to my Aunt Hortisol's, the summer months spent at Châtellerault, the returns to school, seemed to last an age, and yet it

was only three years. Oh! the dear, adorable time when one is a "senior" at school, about to enter upon real life, yet still a child without cares, without renunciations, with an infinity of hope before one! Your hand is on the door-knob of a door; on the other side of that door is the world, amusement, love. You are about to turn the knob, open the door, and enter. . . . But, decidedly, of the two sides of the door, that of the school is the best.

It was last year, perhaps you will remember it, my dear Abbé, that I left the Madonna and you to return home to Châtellerault for good. Our little town, as I told you, is not very dull. In spite of those horrid politics that are always a source of discord, we had our little society—made up of soldiers, functionaries, civilians—which gave some life to the place. They

organized tennis, paper hunts, and a few dances. In short, it was society on a scale that would have made Parisians smile, but which amply sufficed for a young country girl like me. Our officers, almost all belonging to the artillery, changed about every two years. But, as there were always some on hand, and as I set my heart on no one in particular, the change was immaterial to me. There was always some lieutenant, even a captain, who danced well, talked passably, and judged me sufficiently to his taste to talk and dance with me, rather than with any one else. This privileged officer—his name was successively Desfeuilles, d'Erbelincourt, Rodrigues, etc., etc.—was naturally my old friend's *bête noir*. There was a certain discourse on the self-sufficiency, the poor breeding, the egotism, and the lax morals of the present genera-

tion; another on the intellectual and sentimental shortcomings of military men; still another on the ridiculous narrow-mindedness of the Polytechnic School, all of which I heard more often than it was necessary to remember them, for my old friend repeated himself a little. My old friend in fact was getting old, and what proved that I was sincerely fond of him, despite his whims, was that I perceived him ageing, and it pained me. Physically, he was still the same elegant, well-groomed man; neither in hair nor teeth had he given way; but the fine comprehension of surrounding things, accuracy of memory, the sense of the ridiculous began to escape him a little. As *our* Colonel Remy said: "The poor baron was losing his bearings." I was not alone in making fun of the tardy court of which he made me the object. It

made him somewhat ridiculous in every one's eyes, and I felt sorry for him. The heartlessness of the others made me more considerate. How could I let him know? On this point he became more and more intractable. I had to surrender to him the first and best portion of my soirées. MM. Desfeuilles, d'Erbelincourt, Rodrigues, etc., had to take their turn. I willingly lent myself to these whims of his until the day when . . . But I must relate in detail that memorable incident which decided my destiny.

At a ball given at the city hall—on the 6th of February; I have not forgotten the date—I met Captain Langallery. He, by exception, did not belong to the artillery. He had graduated from the Ecole de Guerre and was assigned to the ninth regiment of the line. A mere foot soldier, I hear

you say, but you are not unaware that captains ride on horseback. Langallery was even a remarkable rider. Do you believe in love at first sight, my dear Abbé? You will tell me that such things do not concern you; but I know well that at heart you do not believe in it. Well, you are wrong. I loved at first sight. On my return from the ball, where I had danced only once with M. de Langallery, I called my mother into my room, and threw myself into her arms, saying:

“ My dearest little mamma, I must marry M. de Langallery.”

You can imagine my mother’s face. She thought I had suddenly gone insane.

“ M. de Langallery? Who is M. de Langallery? ”

“ Why, didn’t you see him? That captain with the brown mustache, black eyes, and such fine eyebrows? ”

She did not know whom I meant! She had not noticed any fine eyebrows, brown mustache, or black eyes! She had not remarked my captain from the other captains!

“Well, no matter. I must marry M. de Langallery.”

“My dearest child, you must be jesting! We scarcely know the gentleman. We know nothing of his family. . . .”

“But I do. Langallery, noble Orleans family. His father is dead. Henri has only an old, infirm mother and a married sister.”

“Henri! She calls him Henri! And who gave you all these details?”

“Why—every one, mamma. Oh! don’t be alarmed; I have not compromised myself. I risked a little question here, another there. . . . And when people answered, I pretended to be thinking of something else.”

My mother laughed, somewhat uneasy notwithstanding. I made her sit down in an armchair, and sinking down before her, I clasped her knees, and kissed her very, very hard.

“I may marry M. de Langallery, mamma, may I not?”

“You may if he is a proper husband for you.”

“Didn’t I tell you he is?”

“What do you know about it? Nothing but what you have been told at a dance? Officers as a rule have nothing to live on but their pay.”

How absurd to think of that, I thought! What did I care how rich he was! But you know how parents are, my dear Abbé! However, so as to influence my mother, I murmured:

“Oh, mamma! He has a chateau —think of that!”

“A chateau! We have one, too, in Poitou, a historical one, and if we

wished to live in it we should have to spend three hundred thousand francs on repairs."

After a short silence she added in a low voice:

"And, besides, does he love you?"

"I think he does, mamma."

"Has he told you so?"

"Oh, no, mamma; we only danced once. He said nothing to me."

"Then how do you know he does not love some one else? Suppose he is already engaged?"

Poor mamma must have immediately regretted having advanced this hypothesis. Just imagine, my dear Abbé, I fainted dead away, and it required five minutes' application of salts, vinegar, and tapping on the palms of my hands to bring me to. On opening my eyes I found myself in my room. I felt quite abashed. They left me alone with my mother.

I kissed her and told her I felt well again. There was nothing more said then about M. de Langallery.

That night I slept badly. I constantly saw M. de Langallery kissing young girls; and not one of these girls was like me.

The next day, without saying a word to me, my mother paid a visit to Colonel Remy. She returned radiant, and taking me aside, said:

“I have learned something. M. de Langallery is not engaged. He stands well in the service and is not without means, although not rich.”

I clapped my hands.

“Oh! I am so glad he is not rich!”

“You will dine together on Thursday at Mme. Remy’s.”

We dined together on Thursday at Mme. Remy’s. He arrived punctually, but the last. When he entered the colonel’s drawing room, I

watched my father and mother. They appeared to me to be somewhat disappointed. Doubtless they had expected to see a duke walk in. Would you believe that that pleased me? "So much the better," I thought; "I want to be the only one to think him nice—so no one else shall take him from me."

That is why I became humble before him, I who, the evening before, had laughed at everybody and flirted right and left. Henri noticed it, and I think it touched him. Some men are conquered by resistance, others by immolation. Evidently an immolation was necessary to persuade Henri to marry. So I immolated myself. Oh! the affair did not go so easily! He was not ready to marry. He resisted in spite of himself. But gradually I felt that he was yielding, and I attached him to me by

an infinity of imperceptible, little threads. Neither of us had spoken of love yet, but already we could not be without each other.

And my old friend?

My old friend had seen nothing, and therefore suspected nothing. He continued to be jealous of Desfeuilles, Erbelincourt, Rodrigues, and Co. Henri and I, meantime, maintained irreproachable behavior in society. Only those in the secret could have noticed that each of us was a little nervous and restless when the other was not near, and that we only became "ourselves" in each other's presence. If Desfeuilles, Erbelincourt, Rodrigues, and Co. had had two sous' worth of perspicuity they would have perceived also the difference and distraction I displayed when in their company. They made

me nervous, and annoyed me by paying compliments which I wanted to hear only from one mouth. My old friend alone benefited from this critical state of my heart. I decidedly preferred his society to that of Desfeuilles and Co. He, at least, took from me nothing of what I reserved for Henri. Moreover, he was very fond of me. I felt the warmth of a sincere tenderness rise from my heart when I was near him, and, at that period of my life, I needed so much affection! Would you believe that one day I almost confessed my perplexities and longings to him? Extreme modesty held me back, and you will see that it was for the best.

It took Henri almost two months before he acknowledged to himself that he loved me; but I must admit that once his opinion was formed, he

immediately unbosomed himself to me. I shall see, all my life, that bay window at Colonel Remy's, the Algerian tapestries. . . . It came one evening, after a small impromptu dance. "Mademoiselle Roberte, I have something serious to tell you. I love you, and I beseech you not to repulse me." The words were humble, but were spoken in such a masterful, kingly tone! I answered: "Oh, mon Dieu! I'm so happy!" and I at once fainted away, like a silly child. You can imagine if the incident was noticed, and if gossip spread its wings. Happily, Baron Delaborde was not present.

He was not there because he was ill. He had it reported round town that he had "a severe cold," but every one well knew that it was the cruel cardiac rheumatism with which he was beginning to pay off the debts of his

riotous youth. During the attacks he shut himself up in his room, suffering greatly, but preferring to suffer alone than to be seen at a disadvantage without the toilet accessories that prolonged his youth. He wrote me every day the most witty and gallant letters, and I had to answer him in a similar strain.

We were at lunch one morning—Henri, who had begun his official courtship, my father, my mother, and I—when Doctor Routurier was announced. He was an old friend of the family and was present at my entrance into the world. He was shown in, and he looked greatly worried.

“I have just committed a terrible blunder,” he said. “I went to make my daily visit to Baron Delaborde, who is not doing very well, and while telling him the news, I was unfortunate enough to say that Roberte

was going to be married. The baron at once fell into a syncope, from which I roused him only with the greatest difficulty. At the present moment he is a pitiful object to look at. He can scarcely breathe. He tried to speak, but all I could distinguish was : 'Rodrigues. . . . Marry Rodrigues.' If you feel any regard at all for the poor baron, my dear Mme. Hautecroix, you and Roberte should go and see him."

"What can I tell him?" asked my mother. "Roberte is going to be married. We cannot tell the baron she is not. He will end by learning the truth."

"No, he won't. No one can tell him while he is ill, and this is the time when he must have no excitement. When he is better he may know everything. Please do that for me."

We held a consultation. Henri

said he thought it were better to abstain from doing so. How far he was right I understood later. My parents' sympathy and the doctor's pleading, however, decided the matter. My mother and I went to the baron's house as soon as lunch was over.

Poor baron! Poor old friend! He looked fully his seventy years when I saw him that afternoon, stretched on his bed, his face and hands as yellow as wax, his eyes glassy with anguish, his breathing short and hoarse. Yet he could speak to me. He gasped:

"So . . . you are going to marry . . . Rodrigues?"

The way the question was put permitted me to answer "No!" with some ardor and manifest sincerity. He was not immediately convinced, however. He questioned my mother; he made her swear that the rumor of a marriage with Rodrigues was a

myth. Naturally, we had scruples in telling this demi-falsehood; but are they not told to all invalids to calm and console them?

This was the beginning for us of a long, wearisome trial. Henri, moved to pity himself, dare not forbid the pious visits made daily to the bedside of the invalid, who became more exacting and more irritable. His condition gradually grew critical. His respiration became difficult, and the slightest movement provoked acute pain. In measure as he grew worse, my old friend's affection for me seemed to increase. He wanted me with him oftener, he kept me longer, and I felt that he bore impatiently the presence of my father, or my mother, or Mme. Remy, who accompanied me. There was no further talk between us concerning the marriage with Rodrigues, that had so

greatly disturbed him. He was convinced it was a false alarm. He spoke to me of us both—of himself and me—uniting us as if by a hypothetical marriage, unrealized and unrealizable, but the imagination of which was sweet to him. Being really engaged, and in love at the time in another quarter, I cannot express how these interviews wearied me. How many times was I on the point of breaking his delusion by crying: "No, no! You must not think of me; there is not a particle of me that does not belong to another." . . . But I looked at those poor, wasted features, that poor, decayed body; I heard the painful breathing, that weak voice; and I felt so much pity for my old friend that I restrained myself each time.

What punishes the falsehood, when once told, is the necessity of defending

it by other lies. You can imagine that the situation became completely involved during the days that immediately preceded my marriage. Tired of all this deception, I declared to Doctor Routurier that I absolutely refused to keep it up any longer. Besides, what was the good? All must necessarily be found out, as, the day after the marriage, I was going on a wedding trip for over three weeks.

“Very well,” replied the doctor, after thinking it over. “I understand it must come to an end. I won’t ask you to tell any more falsehoods, but will you permit me to tell them in your place? You can’t blame me, my child. I have charge of a human life. As long as I have any hope left of saving poor Delaborde, I will not expose him to such a shock as the news of your marriage would give him. And I am sure I am doing my duty.”

“ Why, certainly,” I replied. “ Tell these falsehoods, if you must. Your conscience is your own.”

That evening—Henri was in the parlor with me ; we had been left alone, and you may imagine how precious that solitude was to us—the doctor was announced again.

“ It is I again, Roberte,” he said, piteously. “ Have you still a little friendship left for me, who brought you into the world ? ”

“ You know I have.”

“ Well! You must give me back the promise that I gave you this morning. Here is what happened at the baron’s. To explain the cessation of your visits, I told him that you were suffering from a violent cold, and that, as your chest was quite delicate—”

“ Has Roberte a delicate chest ? ” interrupted Henri, uneasily.

“ No, no; not at all. She is just as solid and healthy as you are. It was only one falsehood more; that is all. I told him I had forbidden her to go out, and had even advised her parents to send her south until spring. Poor baron! If you had seen his expression of utter woe! ‘ So she is going away! Oh! doctor, don’t do that. What will become of me, without her?’ I had to answer him in the most severe tone I could assume: ‘ You selfish man! That poor girl has cared for you as if she were your own daughter! Are you not ashamed to have so little love for her?’

“ ‘ At least will she come and bid me good-by?’ he asked again, so sadly that I was much moved. ‘ Why, certainly, she will come if you behave yourself.’ And so I left him, almost calm. I came now to beg you to pay one more visit to your friend—the

farewell visit. This time it will not be a lie. You can go the same day that you leave for Italy."

I consulted Henri.

"Very well," he said. "We are too happy to have the right to be uncharitable."

I kissed him for those words.

"Thank you, dearest! I should have obeyed you, no matter what you decided. But, you see, to leave without granting that poor invalid his wish might not bring us good luck."

It had been settled that our wedding night should be passed in our own house at Ingrandes—a few kilometres from Châtellerault—in order not to add the fatigue of the journey to the fatigue of the wedding day. My mother, my father, and Henri's mother were to come the next day and dine with us, and after dinner we were to leave for San-Remo.

Would you believe, dear Abbé, that were it not for my husband—my dearest husband—I should perhaps have forgotten to go and say good-by to Baron Delaborde? It was hardly my fault. I was so happy, in our peaceful little country place, alone with him! I did not like to lose any of those precious minutes!

“ You promised him, my beloved,” said Henri. “ You cannot draw back now. But we will reduce the time of the visit to a minimum. I will have the coupé brought round. We will go straight to Châtellerault and drive to the baron’s house. You will go up alone, and I will wait for you in the carriage. You will stay a quarter of an hour; we will return immediately, and the entire trip will not have lasted an hour, and we shall only have been separated a few minutes.”

This we did. You cannot picture,

my dear Abbé, the joy of the poor baron when he saw his little friend enter. He became reanimated, recovered for an instant his youthful expression of the old days.

“Roberte!” he cried. “And alone!”

I sat down near him, happy to see the pleasure my visit caused him. When I myself am very happy I always want at once to do good to others, from selfishness, I think, to guarantee my own happiness. Without an effort, I was more affectionate than I had ever been. He looked at me with affectionate admiration, but rather anxiously.

“I do not know what there is changed about you. It is you and yet it is not you. Is my sight failing?”

He spoke to me in the familiar second person singular, which surprised me. He had ceased doing so

for a long time. I noticed, too, that his manner was no longer the same. He seemed to have abandoned all pretension to coquetry and youthfulness. For the first time he was simple and fatherly. How much better I liked it!

“Are you going to stay long in Italy?” he asked, holding my hands in his, which trembled nervously from time to time.

“Three weeks, I think. Not more than a month.”

“How long it is! Who knows if you will see me again?”

“Oh!” I cried, bursting into tears.
“Do not say that.”

He continued, in a calm voice:

“If . . . on your return you do not find me . . . here . . . you must not forget me. You must go and see me, wherever I shall be . . . and pray for me. If I thought that you would never think of me

when you'll no longer see me, it would grieve me greatly; really, it would grieve me more than being old and having to die."

I wept silently, my face in my hands.

"You must remember the old friend who loved you so well, Roberte. . . . I do not know how you will be loved later on; but surely no one will love you as I have loved you. . . . Merely by your presence you have effaced all the recollections of my life, full as it is of memories! It seems to me that these last few years have been the best of all. Ah! I feel that you must have laughed, at times, when I was jealous and spoke to you as a man of your own age would have done. Think of that weakness of mine with indulgence, Roberte, or do not think of it at all. You must never laugh at having been loved."

He no longer gasped; his voice became softer. His pain seemed to have left him.

“How unfortunate,” he went on, “that you were so young and I so old! How different my life might have been had I met, at thirty, a woman such as you!”

We remained without speaking for some little time. He waited until my tears were dry, then added:

“Go, my child, *they are waiting for you.*”

It was only later that I thought of those last words, and they seemed singular to me. I also remembered that he had asked me no question relative to the conditions under which I was taking the trip, or as to who was to be my companion—nothing. Did he then suspect? Or did he know?

Very much moved, I extended my

forehead, which he kissed paternally. I left the room, and ran and threw myself in my husband's arms, where I soon found peace.

Were I to tell you, my dear Abbé, that during our stay at San-Remo the recollection of my old friend haunted me to the point of preventing the full enjoyment of my happiness, you would not believe me, and you would be right. Melancholy recollections can effect nothing in presence of certain happy realities. Yet I was not oblivious to the point of forgetting to inquire, two or three times, in my letters to my mother, regarding the baron's health. At first my mother answered that there was no change, then answered nothing at all concerning him; and in the disposition of mind I

was in, I was willing to believe that all was going on well.

It was only the day after my return to Châtellerault—they had prepared our new residence while we were travelling; for the first time I was in my own home, mistress of the house, and I had to dinner, besides my father and mother, Doctor Routurier—that I asked:

“By the way, how is the baron?”

The question fell on the company like a bolt. All were silent, and looked at each other. I was afraid to understand.

“My God!” I stammered. “Is he——”

My mother arose and kissed me.

“Yes, my dearest . . . we did not write you, so as not to cause you pain. . . . *It* happened in less than a fortnight after you left . . . suddenly.”

When I had recovered a little from the burst of tears caused by this news, I asked for details. My old friend had died almost suddenly, although conscious; for three days he waited for and desired the end. He died holding my portrait between his poor trembling fingers. They also told me something else: a will, drawn subsequently to my marriage, named, as his sole legatee, Mademoiselle Roberte Hautecroix. The neglected heirs contested the will, arguing that I was not Mademoiselle when it was signed.

Henri and I agreed at once to renounce my rights. The thought alone horrified us, that the pious frauds of the last days could be paid for in bank-notes. No, I have kept nothing belonging to my old friend except that portrait of me which he loved and which he had looked at while dying. From the unknown

where he is now, if he sees the past and the present, he knows that his little friend only deceived him from affection and pity. . . . Yet, will he pardon her for having deceived him? Does he hate her for the consoling illusion in which she let him fall asleep in the last slumber? At times I wonder and feel uneasy, but Henri, when he is near me, always reassures me. Yet in the long hours of solitude, as now, I am no longer mistress of my thoughts. I feel a vague, vague remorse, which at times becomes painful. I keep seeing my old friend, with his bright eyes, his erect figure, his white teeth; he says to me sadly: "Why did you lie to me, little Roberte?" Ah! how frightful is that space between life and the tomb which muffles our voices when we address the beings that have disappeared! What shall I do? Reassure me, my

dear Abbé. You know the words that console; find a peaceful spot in my heart for the remembrance of my old friend!

A Rescue.

MADAME VEUVE MORISSET OF IS-
SOUDUN TO MONSIEUR MAURICE
LEBLOND, STUDENT OF SPECIAL
MATHEMATICS AT COLLEGE.

Mon Dieu! Monsieur Maurice, how grieved I should be if my letter shocked you or led you to suppose that your mother's best friend is an unprincipled woman, unworthy of the esteem of Madame Leblond or yourself! I should never have written you this letter, no, never, never, had it not been for a trifling incident which happened yesterday, and which enlightened me concerning something that I did not even suspect. . . . All night long I thought it over: Shall I

write to Maurice? Or is it better not to write? On rising this morning I had almost decided to remain quiet, and not to write at all. And yet here I am, I do not know how, an hour later, with my pen in my hand. Promise me, at least, to be discreet; not to show my letter to your companions, and to burn it directly you have read it.

I have known you for a long time, Monsieur Maurice. While your father and my poor husband lived they were the best friends in the world, and when your mother and I became widows, almost about the same time, we tried to console ourselves by coming together often and speaking of those who were gone. At that time you were not the tall young man you are to-day, but a little collegian in velvet knickerbockers and turned-down collar, and you were blond, rosy-

cheeked, and sweet as a girl. Had any one told me that that little Maurice would pay me court I should certainly have laughed heartily. And if any one had added that I myself——But don't let us go too fast. . . .

Although you quickly grew up, I always looked on you as a child, as you, in fact, would look on your own mother, until a certain evening when, invited to dinner by her, I felt you touch my foot with yours beneath the table. I was so surprised at first, that I could not believe it to be true. One often touches one's neighbor's foot by accident, but when the lady's slipper is discreetly withdrawn and the neighbor's shoe follows it and attempts to engage it in conversation by pressure and little taps, there is no more room for doubt. Even a virtuous woman is forced to understand. Do me the justice to ad-

mit that I behaved then, as ever since, with perfect propriety. My slipper made no response to your shoe, and you only succeeded in taking away my appetite, from sheer surprise.

“What!” I said to myself, after the dinner was over, and while talking with your dear mother, “what! that nice little Maurice, such a well-bred boy, takes the liberty of touching the foot of his mother’s friend under the table? A child of his age!” And I looked at you and was forced to admit to myself that you were no longer such a child as all that. It was last year, toward the close of winter. You were as tall as you are now and just as big. You had scarcely less hair on your chin and about as much on your upper lip. One could no longer be mistaken; you were a young man, and undoubtedly, as you passed along the streets,

the pretty girls you met already attracted your notice. "No matter," I thought, "nineteen is too early an age for him to think of women, especially when he is preparing for the high school. He will have time for that when he has his diploma." So I pretended not to notice the glances you gave me nor the tender feeling of your shoe for my slipper.

Then you wrote me. You dared to write to me at my house—love-letters—beseeching me to answer you in care of the post-office. They were very nice letters too, Monsieur Maurice. I have kept them and often reread them. It is a pity you chose a scientific career, because with your ability for turning phrases, you would certainly have been able to make a fine position for yourself in literature.

Ah! I do not wish to boast, but I think there are few women at Issou-

dun who would have resisted as I did! You must know, Monsieur Maurice, that you are a very attractive man. You have the fine features of your mother, who was so beautiful. It is something to be the first woman to whom a handsome boy like you shows attention. And you are so well bred too! You were always respectful to me, with the exception of that bad habit of touching my foot under the table! But I resisted you; I did not answer your letters; to say, however, that I was indifferent and undisturbed—— No, I should be telling an untruth were I to say so. Only I was restrained, you understand, first by my principles, and also by my friendship for your mother. . . . I should have had scruples in diverting from his work, and mathematics, a young man who needed all his time to prepare for college.

That is why, my dear Monsieur Maurice, at the end of a year's courting, you have obtained nothing from me, nothing at all, not even a kiss on the hand. . . .

Now, yesterday (and this is the incident to which I have alluded), while I was at the bank, waiting my turn to draw some money, I happened to see you pass. You had your books under your arm and were on your way to college for the afternoon course. When you reached the corner of the street, a woman coming from an opposite direction ran into you; and I saw you, not without surprise, instead of letting her pass on her way, begin to talk to her, as if she were an old acquaintance. And such a woman! No, really, Monsieur Maurice, I believed you to have better taste! A woman whose reputation is notorious!

(It was my poor husband who told me about her, I remember.) After a few minutes' conversation, you shook hands with her before every one, and I heard you say: "I'll see you to-morrow night!"

To-morrow night! . . .

So, monsieur, you, whom your mother believes a little saint, spend your time, your money, and your health in visiting ladies of easy virtue! Do you not know what those women are, my poor child? Have you no regret at giving up to them the best part of your youth, the best beats of your heart, and your first kisses? And yet I, finding you so nice, so intelligent, so well bred, made it my duty to repulse you, so that no one might accuse me of having, so to speak, demoralized you! But, corrupt you are, unfortunately, and in the worst way. Ah! if I had only

known! If I had only suspected it! I might have been able, perhaps, to save you.

However, I have thought it over. All is not lost yet, and it may still be possible to pluck you from the hands of those wicked women. I have hesitated to confide in your mother; I feared to alarm her; she loves you so much! She is so far from imagining anything! Therefore I decided to write you. Come and see me this evening, at my house, after eight o'clock. I wish to speak to you, to advise you in perfect friendship, and, if there is still time for it, to preserve at least your future.

Come. I know that I compromise myself, that my action would seem extraordinary to many. But I will do my duty according to my conscience. I surely owe that to your dear mother.

Genevieve's Note-Book.

I.

THE BLUES.

May 20.

Why am I anxious and sad? Why is my heart so full of horrid *blues*, as our poor Mother Reine-des-Anges used to say in the happy days when I had only a school-girl's cares—when I was neither married nor What was I going to write? All my happiness now consists in being a mamma. All my joy is my nineteen-months old darling boy, my plump little René.

Mother Reine-des-Anges, who used this expression *blues* to denote the vague, oppressive, heavy, and obscure

things that weigh upon the heart without one's knowing whence they come, or what they are, had also found a process for fighting the *blues*. This is how she did it:

You shut yourself up in your room with pen or pencil in hand, before a large sheet of blank paper. Then you begin to carefully read within yourself. By dint of this introspection you almost always end by finding the *blues*, huddled together at the bottom of your heart, each in a different corner; that is to say, the true causes of the vague melancholy are gradually unmasked and explained. And as each one is recognized, you note it down on the paper, as clearly as possible and in numerical order. When the list is finished, you examine each *blue* in detail; you try to find a remedy for it; you try to be resigned; you pray a little, and almost always

the operation suffices to restore you to good humor and peace of mind.

Alas! as I advance in the emancipated life—and as yet I have gone only a very short distance—I perceive why this existence is so full of failures and wretchedness. It is because I am no longer tied down to the salutary discipline of the convent. If one only knew how to transport that discipline into one's married and social life, what strong-willed women we should be!

It is never too late to endeavor to do right. So let us try this remedy of Mother Reine-des-Anges, applied to the particular case of Genevieve Olivier, here present, former student of the Sacré Cœur de Blois, now Countess Raoul de Boistelle, twenty-two years of age, married three years, the possessor of a love of a baby that I adore, and of a wretched, very

wretched, and charming husband
. . . whom I also adore, alas!

Here, in front of me, is the sheet of white paper. I take a new pen, make myself comfortable, and lock the door of my room. Baby is asleep, his nurse with him. Raoul is at the club (at three o'clock in the afternoon and a Sunday, too! Well, let us think so, provisionally). No one will disturb me for the next two hours. Let us begin.

My Blues.

1st. It is Sunday; a sad day, particularly between lunch and dinner-time. It is also abominably warm, and when it is hot I am simply lifeless.

2d. Baby has a little pimple at the corner of his mouth. The dear child has caused me anxiety for more than

a week. He has always had such magnificent health and color, but the last few days he is pale and feverish. His nurse says he does not sleep well.

3d. Whitefern has made a failure of my travelling dress. After trying it on six times, he sent it to me this morning while I was still asleep—purposely, no doubt, so that it would be impossible for me to try it on in the presence of the employé. I look frightful and ridiculous in it. It is very annoying. Now my departure for Talloires will be delayed.

4th. And finally, the great, the genuine *blue*, the only one, after all, that really counts. I am jealous, horribly jealous. Not a stupid jealousy, without motive, or for the pleasure of tormenting myself and my husband. I have good reasons.

Raoul no longer loves me. If I

were to die he would be sorry, of course, but I don't think his grief would last long. It's evident that I bore him, and that he prefers to be where I am not present. (It breaks my heart to even write this; but the system of Mother Reine-des-Anges demands it. One must submit to a rigorous and truthful examination when analyzing one's *blues*.)

To be displeasing to one's husband is dreadful enough, but that is not all. Raoul seeks more genial company elsewhere. Oh! I do not know exactly who the woman is that has stolen him from me, nor to what extent he has been stolen. If I only knew! It is certain, though, that he is being taken from me.

My suspicions rest on a young girl and a young married woman.

A young girl, indeed! How can one apply the term, the same that was

given to us in our innocent convent days, to Mlle. Luce de Giverney, one of those little ultra-fashionable Parisiennes who have brought to our shores the manners of the new world, less self-respect for herself? For American girls, however much they flirt, know how to defend themselves. Mlle. Luce de Giverney goes out driving alone, and one meets her at the Champs de Mars Salon in company with a man who is showing her the pictures. If Mme. de Giverney's carriage stands in front of the entrance, that is considered sufficient for appearances. At dances, too, Mlle. de Giverney selects a man she fancies, takes him off to a secluded corner, and sits with him all evening. At the Avrezac dance, the day before yesterday, my husband was her favorite partner. And he affected to be surprised afterwards, when I had an at-

tack of hysterics in the carriage on our way home.

I have Mlle. de Giverney on my mind, and also Mme. Delaveaux. The latter is a painter's wife, a stout little blonde and a very pretty woman, far too pretty. Why should we receive in our set, people that do not belong to it, like those Delaveaux, people whose past is identified with cheap restaurants, public balls, furnished rooms, and studios? Where could the man have found his wife? It was said that she was formerly a studio model and that she lived with him before he married her. Nevertheless, they are received everywhere; he because of his talent and wit, she because she is so pretty that she changes all the men into fools merely by touching them with her fat little hand.

She has set her cap at my husband.

(All the women pay court to Raoul. Heavens! how I wish he were less attractive! I should love him just as much, and they would not try so hard to steal him from me.) For the past fortnight Mme. Delaveaux has flirted desperately with Raoul, and he appeared to be taking great interest in her, when suddenly there came a change; they scarcely spoke to one another; it seemed as if they avoided each other. I, simple creature, was pleased, thinking, "Thank heaven! they're tired of each other. I was mistaken." But mamma, who is remarkably clear-sighted, and is always the first to point out all Raoul does that is wrong, said to me:

"Take care, child! They no longer flirt in public; they probably meet in private. Watch your husband."

"You don't think it is Mlle. de Giverney?" I replied.

" Beware of Mlle. de Giverney too."
I suffer horribly.

These are my *blues*. I cannot perceive any others by the most searching examination. I must now dissect them and remove them if I can.

I will not dwell long on the first one. That it is hot, and that it is Sunday, are facts with which one cannot reasonably reproach Providence. However, I do two things. I order Kate to carefully close the windows, blinds, and curtains of my room during the entire morning, while it is exposed to the sun; and I make a resolution to hereafter attend vespers, which will while away the afternoon very pleasantly.

Second *blue*: The pimple, and baby's ailments. Doctor Amand, our regular family physician, came this morning and declared that there was noth-

ing to fear, that all children have febrile attacks at this period of the year. However, there is an epidemic of infantile smallpox in certain districts of Paris. I will write to Doctor Robin, in whom I have great confidence, and beg him to come and examine baby to-morrow at the latest.

Third *blue*: My spoilt dress. I make up my mind to return it to Whitefern, telling him very plainly that I do not want it altered again, and that I will not take it, but that I am ready to have him make another. Mme. Avrezac has done so without difficulty. Whitefern is very reasonable, but I must write to him personally, not to his employés, who are very uncivil. They can make me a new dress in five days, so my departure for Talloires need not be delayed in the least.

There only remains, therefore, the most important *blue*—my husband, that wretch of a Raoul. O Good Mother Reine-des-Anges, who now are chanting canticles in Paradise, inspire me on this point with the thoughts that a reasonable and Christian wife should have! You will surely understand that I cannot resign myself to be forsaken for a Mme. Delaveaux or for a Mlle. de Giverney. I have nothing to reproach myself with, I assure you, good Mother Reine-des-Anges. I love Raoul infinitely; I think only of him. My whole being belongs to him so much that—how can I dare to express it?—at times I feel a remorse for belonging to him so blindly. And yet I am not ugly, Mother Reine, and I assure you that more than once attentions have been paid me since my *début* in society. Is it just, because Raoul

feels that I am so entirely his, his thing as it were, that he no longer cares for me?

Must I then no longer show any affection to him? Must I flirt also; make him jealous, make use of the methods usual in novels and comedies? Oh! how repugnant that would be to me! No, I will not do that; I will not regain my husband's affections at the cost of my self-respect. Only, I think it will be well to keep watch over my feelings; I must make Raoul understand my grief, but not by tears (I have already wept in his presence, alas! and I feel that that spoils everything), but by silence and by . . . abstention. It will cost me a great deal, but I must.

I decide henceforth to treat my husband with coldness and submission, and no more.

Now, what can I do about my two

enemies, Mlle. de Giverney and Mme. Delaveaux? I certainly do not wish to make a scene in public, and besides, Raoul, although he flirts outrageously with these creatures, never forgets that he is a gentleman. He would not furnish me with the opportunity for a scene. Must I be resigned then? I cannot. I am not sufficiently heroic, not enough of a saint, to allow myself to be deceived. I do not believe God exacts that of me. I am entitled to my husband's fidelity. If I am not to have it, I would prefer to live alone, with my darling baby, who, perhaps, will console me.

So I have decided on this. I will ascertain the truth, and if it is more than I can bear, I will beg my mother to return with me and my baby to our home in the Loir-et-Cher. But how can I find out?

The other day a prospectus came

addressed to me, Countess de Boistelle, and I opened it before my husband, entirely ignorant of what it contained. It was the circular of an agency which makes it a business to watch husbands for wives who suspect infidelity, and also to spy upon wives for the husbands' benefit. I handed the paper to Raoul, who, immediately he saw what it was, crushed it up with an annoyed air.

He need not feel annoyed. I would never use such means. I would never have him watched by a detective. I will watch him myself, as one watches a soldier who is suspected of meditating desertion. He need not fear that I will open his letters, or that I will go through his desk. . . . But, since the wife must follow her husband, and since the husband should not go where the wife cannot follow, let him take care! Some day,

perhaps, while going to some rendezvous, happy with that wicked joy I sometimes noticed in his eyes, voice, and gestures, it will be his wife whom he will find.

Here I am at the end of my reflections. They have not consoled me, but they have quieted me a little. The acute headache has gradually changed into a dull neuralgia.

I leave the writing desk and go to the window, the one in the middle, which opens out on the terrace.

I want to breathe the cool evening air. Past six already! How long I have been thinking! Now the sun is hidden by the great eucalyptus trees that line the foot of our garden, imparting the illusion that there are no more houses, no more Paris, in that

direction. In the sunless garden there reigns a delicious warmth. In spite of the hot days of the precocious spring, the *fundo dell'aria*, as they say in Florence, still retains its coolness. What a delightful evening! How enviable and rare are all such things as this garden and mansion, situated in the very centre of the faubourg Saint-Honoré! How many reasons I have, apparently, for enjoying life and being happy! Good relatives, a charming husband—too charming—a love of a baby, all my caprices satisfied. . . . Ah! how I should enjoy life if a pair of blue eyes and a pair of black eyes did not exist! I am not cruel, but if I could extinguish those eyes, the blue and the black, gently, without making their owners suffer, without causing too much grief to those who love them—I mean to those who *have the right* to love them. . . .

Is that wicked? Ah! well! I love my husband and I want him for myself alone—that is all.

II.

THE CONSOLATION.

May 26.

All alone again this evening, like so many nights this year!

Where is Raoul?

I did not even ask him where he was going—tired of the eternal falsehood that comes so easily: “I’m going to the club.”

But I’ll be frank. I must admit that to-day he offered to escort me to the Avrezac’s, where a comedy written by a young officer of the chasseurs is to be given. But I knew that

Mlle. de Giverney played in the piece the rôle of a *fin-de-siècle* *ingénue* (so said the programme), and that killed my desire to be present. I am confident that Raoul will be there, and so will Mme. Delaveaux. At this very moment perhaps he is near one of them; fixing her with that half-ironical, half-admiring look that he gives women who please him, but whom he does not esteem. When he loved me he looked at me differently.

Well, don't let us think of all that. I have near me a consolation that makes me forget everything, that is worth more than all the rest. This evening I sent baby's nurse to the circus with the governess of the little Virmondoy's girls, and it is I who am watching over René's slumber, seated near his cot.

Master René is sleeping, lying on his back, his left arm outside the crib;

his pink fist, tightly clenched, grasps the border of the sheet. His night-cap, slightly inclined toward the ear, gives a saucy expression to his good-natured little face, all puffed up with slumber. He pouts his moist lips while asleep, and from time to time murmurs incoherent words.

Ah! what a little love! I have a mad desire to eat him up with kisses.

But don't let us awaken him. When his first sleep is disturbed, Master Baby absolutely refuses to go to sleep again before his second nap is due; that is to say, about one o'clock in the morning. For his sleep is divided into two sections, with an interval of about three-quarters of an hour, during which he sings, speaks, moves about, and drinks his milk with a drop of orange flower in it. He is a person of the most regular habits.

He will be nineteen months old on

the fourth of June next. He is very strong and unusually big. His nurse tells me that at the Tuileries every one thinks him much older than he is. But perhaps she only says that to please me. I do so want René to be the biggest, the strongest, the handsomest, and the most intelligent of all. Maternity is permissible pride and egotism, it seems to me.

Yet I do not believe I am blinded as far as my son is concerned. Although he promises to be a handsome boy, nothing shows at present that he will be exceptionally intelligent. He speaks very little. Little Julie Virmondoy, who is two months older, speaks fluently. But then René's confused language is so delightful!

He calls mamma "Moomie," and with these two syllables he can obtain from her anything he wants. He points out the portrait of his father as

“Tata Pongy.” I make him say his prayer every evening when he goes to bed, a simple little prayer within his reach.

“Good Jesus, I offer you my heart. Let me grow up to serve you, and give health to my papa, mamma, grandma, and nurse. Amen.”

As said by Master Baby, the prayer sounds somewhat as follows:

“Dood Zesus . . . heart
. . . me drow . . . servoo
. . . Dive health tata, moomie,
damma, nurse. 'Men.”

But if he swallows several syllables, he retrieves himself with his signs of the cross. He makes at least a dozen before and as many after. Little darling!

He has improved during the last few days. Yet the doctor still comes to pay him a visit every morning, but as yet I have been unable to obtain

from him to-day a definite answer—the hearty “Nothing to fear” that I so long to hear. When I think of the fragility of this little adored being, whom some horrid fever could take from me in a few hours, I almost go out of my mind. I get up, run to baby’s cradle, and am only reassured when I have seen his regular breathing raise the coverlid, seen his little hands move, heard the nonsensical language of his slumber.

And while I remain near my son, Raoul is busy soliciting a rendezvous from Mme. Delaveaux or in arranging tête-à-têtes with Mlle. de Giverney. For I no longer believe that all these pretended flirtations stop at the demi-virgin stage. My personal experience, and more particularly my mother’s warning, have opened my eyes, once so innocent.

"When your husband is flirting," says mamma, "you may rest easy; between this flirtation and adultery there is only the distance of a material possibility!" *Flirt!* A frightful word—hypocritical, deceitful, and dangerous! Now when I hear it uttered near me I have a horror of it as of a filthy word.

To while away some of the hours occupied by baby's bedside, I have just been to Raoul's smoking room, his own room, where he receives his friends, and where I scarcely ever enter. I wanted to get a few newspapers. There they are, piled up beside me, the *Figaro*, *Gil Blas*, the *Gaulois*, *Libre Parole*. Raoul is the most disorderly of husbands in his habits—I must also say the most trusting—and as usual had calmly left his bunch of keys in his desk.

Was I tempted? No, really, I do not think I was.

It was rather the fear of being tempted that prompted me to run away. Returning to my own room, I immediately rang for my husband's valet, Joseph, who has been with him since his boyhood. The man is entirely devoted to him, and is, I feel, my enemy. I sent him to look for the papers. A moment later he brought them to me. But I am certain he had removed the keys.

Now let me read a little. I rarely read the papers. The papers that are said to be serious bore me; the others, those that publish stories that our brothers and husbands think amusing, are full of allusions I do not understand; several, however, I understand only too well, and it pains me to read them as it would to see a deformity or a wound.

Raoul says this particular journal is read regularly by stock brokers, clubmen, and fast women. Let us try its effect on a woman who is not fast, yet the wife of a clubman. . . . At the beginning is the story of a gentleman who kills his dog after his wife's death. I said so; I do not understand. That must be very improper. How happy I am I do not understand a word!

After that come the "Echoes." I learn that yesterday were seen at the Bois Mlles. Irma Descloziers, Marguerite de Bourgogne, Ludovique Surville, Champagné, etc., etc. Now, whom can that possibly interest? The friends of those women, doubtless. They must be numerous, since so much pains is taken to please them.

Politics. I'll let that pass. General news: An unfaithful bank clerk—The wood-pavers' strike—The drama

of the Passage de l'Elysée—A jealous wife who fires a revolver at her husband. Poor woman! It's the same in all classes, among the lowest as well as among the highest. We are always the victims. But how can these women bring themselves to kill the man they love?

News of the theatre—Mathematical problems—Answers to correspondents—Personals. Ah! those are amusing. What dramas and comedies appear side by side in those few lines!

• • • • •

Tr. I have passed a h. nwpfk uqwu vgu hgpgvtgu of whom three were qwxgtogu. Ogtetgfk will be almost a vqtvwtg if I have not p. vg tgxqkt ugwnng. You will name the day when you getkcu to vjgtgug that

you will say ng lqwt qw pgwu pqwu xgttpu. Try xgpftgik.

Fus. Thanks 2 let. writ. Hel A.
S. tris. s. v. peus. tro.

Map. At yr. meet. Sep. on Sat. 3.
Ard. fr.

N. E. B. tris in Sep. Regr. hav.
compr. syst. Try ag.

Suddenly my heart stood still. It seemed as if my life-blood were leaving me. The paper dropped to the floor, and sinking back in my chair, I sat for a long time motionless and almost unconscious.

When the first shock had passed away, but still weak and agitated, I picked up the paper again. My eyes stayed rivetted for a long time on the

lines that had overwhelmed me. Here they are:

R.—Joy ! To-morrow evening (Saturday) ; succeeded in escaping from that horrible country. Will be at the nest at ten o'clock. But do not come unless you have decided to be good. Suze.

Why was I immediately convinced that R. was meant for Raoul, my husband, and that Suze was Suzanna Delaveaux?

Reasonably, there is not the least reason to make me think so. As far as I know, Mme. Delaveaux has not been away from Paris. I even said to Raoul, when speaking to him of to-day's soirée, trying to tease him:

“ You will see your beautiful Suzanna there. . . .”

And he smiled without replying.

Was he ignorant of her absence, or was he tricking me? I do not know. But I am positive that this "Personal" is addressed by Mme. Delaveaux to Raoul. I am sure of it, in some mysterious and invincible manner. And against that feeling nothing can avail.

Word by word I reread the frightful lines. Every word becomes animated and becomes a living thing. The whole phrase seems like the tentacles of a sort of octopus. That cynical cry: "*Joy!*" . . . means on the escape from her husband, after telling him all kind of falsehoods. . . . *Will be at the nest.* . . . I restrain myself . . . and I cannot avoid weeping. The nest! the nest! What I have doubted is true then, is a fact! There is a place in Paris where the man to whom I gave myself entirely—oh! so completely—possesses an-

other home; and it is not a home of which I or our child is a part!

The last words, in spite of their repugnant familiarity, have left me some little hope: *Do not come unless you have decided to be good.* What does the wicked woman expect, then? She does not love him; that is sure. A woman in love could never have written that!

Here is nurse returning from the theatre. I'll send her to sleep in her own room, and I will have a couch made for me for to-night near René's cradle. I could not see Raoul again to-day. . . . No, I could not. Here, near my son, I shall perhaps have the strength not to give way to despair.

Ah! my dear little consolation!

III.

ANXIETY.

Sad, sad, beginning of a sad day. It is raining. And the rain so much wished for during the last few weeks of terrible heat is a fitting frame to my desolation. Everything is happening to overwhelm me at once. Baby slept badly toward morning; he is scarcely any better. I am anxiously waiting for Doctor Robin. Is not this new trial too much, O God? For now I can no longer doubt. When I saw Raoul this morning I asked him, trying to be calm:

“Was Mme. Delaveaux there?”

He hesitated before answering.

“I don’t think so. No, in fact I know she wasn’t.”

“Has she already left Paris?” I persisted.

He made an impatient gesture.

“My dear Genevieve, how do I know? Am I Mme. Delaveaux’s keeper? Moreover, I must request you to cease referring to that lady, whom you detest, I don’t know why, for she has always been very nice to you.”

I felt so angry that I determined not to say another word to him. I did not even tell him of my anxiety regarding the baby. Very well! Let him amuse himself away from home. I prefer to carry alone the weight of my anxiety. His son is no longer his. I will take him away from him.

About ten o’clock I was thinking of all these sad things, sitting near the baby’s crib and waiting for the doctor, with the nurse, when Kate

came in carrying a box from Leuchar's.

“The man is waiting,” said the girl. “They are not sure if it is for madame.”

On the card I read:

*Mme. de Boistelle,
rue Vézelay, No. 13.*

Now, I live in the faubourg Saint-Honoré. Besides, I always give my address as Countess de Boistelle. The error was evident. I had the man brought in.

“I have ordered nothing from your firm,” I said to him. “Take it back; I do not know what it is.”

“Yes, madame,” said the man. “We were afraid there was some mistake, for we have madame's address. But the count himself ordered it, and

as I found no one at the rue Vézelay——”

I must have grown very pale all at once, for the man stopped suddenly. However, I was able to answer:

“ It’s not for me. Take it back.”

And I fled to my room, so that I could weep.

Mere accident has put me in possession of all my husband’s secrets. I know that Mme. Delaveaux has given him a rendezvous for this evening. I know where the rendezvous is. Raoul has not even taken the trouble to conceal his name, and his mistress styles herself doubtless: *Countess de Boistelle!* The threads of the intrigue are between my fingers. What shall I do with them?

Is it not my duty to prevent my husband from becoming a criminal? It is repugnant to me to make an investigation and follow him. But what

prevents me from warning him, and from trying to keep him from that woman?

I can say to Raoul, when he comes in to lunch: "I know all!" and explain to him the circumstances that made me acquainted with the facts.

Yes; but he will deny it. He has learned to lie from his association with those creatures: and I am so poor at arguing with him! It will only end in a scene. He will go out and slam the doors behind him, will dine at the club in the evening, and then go to the rue Vézelay after dinner.

It would be much better to say nothing, but to go this evening, reach the rue Vézelay before him, and wait for him at the door. Then he could not deny any further, and (I know him), placed between his wife and his mistress, he will not hesitate. But how horrible to stand watching them

in the street, to have to confront them!

No matter; I must do it.

Same day, two o'clock.

The doctor came, but he did not allay my anxiety. Baby does not show any improvement at all. His fever is increasing. Every instant I hear his dear, tearful voice saying, "Moomie . . . told." He shivers, and when I touch his poor little limbs I find them bathed in perspiration.

"Is it serious?" I asked the doctor. "Tell me the truth. I wish to know."

He shook his head, an expression of doubt on his face.

"Serious! I cannot tell yet. At present there is only a little fever; that is all. It may go just as it came."

"And if it does not go?"

"Ah! then he will have some childish complaint."

"Measles?"

"Measles or scarlatina. . . ."

"Not smallpox, God forbid!"

Smallpox! That frightens me so! This morning I glanced feverishly over the papers. The epidemic is diminishing in violence, but there are still a number of victims. To think how many mothers, like myself, having no joy but their baby—and yet God has taken it. Will He spare mine to me?

The doctor would not commit himself. He told me the same things I had told myself, to reassure me: that the child's health was excellent, that his illness presented at present no dangerous characteristic, not the slightest rash on his face or on the body. Alas! all that they tell me, all

that I tell myself, does not convince me.

At lunch this morning Raoul and I said very little. I noticed, however, on my husband's part, a desire to be agreeable, an effort to make amends for his exhibition of temper this morning. Or perhaps it was remorse for the treason contemplated for this evening.

"Is baby any better?" he asked.

"No," I answered. "On the contrary, he had a very bad night. I am very uneasy."

Tears filled my eyes, as much from enervation as from sorrow. Raoul rose up and made a movement as if to kiss me. Then I thought of that woman whose cheeks and lips he also touches, and I drew back instinctively. He merely touched my hair. When he regained his place, I noticed that he was very pale; he broke the stem

of his glass a moment later. Our lunch ended in silence. The moment Raoul lit his cigar I went up to baby.

Have pity on me, O my God, and sustain me; give me the confidence and courage of a true Christian woman to bear the sorrows you send me! I am so small a thing! I feel I have so little strength to resist all this anxiety! Must I then, in order to be a wife and mother after your heart, be stricken both through my child and my husband at the same time?

I am a coward before this double trial. O God, forgive me; I can only ask you to take both trials from me. I have not the courage to bear that either Raoul or René be taken from me. . . . I would prefer that you should strike me instead. I am of so little consequence here below. I offer you my life, rather than my husband

should be unfaithful or my child's life
be endangered!

IV.

ALL'S WELL. . . .

Talloires, June 18.

How peaceful, grand, and smiling is everything around this country chalet! In the distance, lulled to slumber beneath the setting sun, are the azure mountains capped with snow. Before us stretches the great lake, like a vast mirror of polished silver. Paris lies away off beyond the horizon.

Paris is far off, and so are the cruel hours of yesterday—hours so cruel that I truly longed for death; I asked

God, from the bottom of my heart, to take me to Him, unable to bear more. And now my misery is all ended, it is all over. Life recommences bright and happy, and the reaction has been so sudden that I scarcely dare believe it.

The last lines I find in my notebook are hopeless: "I am of no consequence here below. I offer you my life, sooner than my husband should be unfaithful or my child's life be endangered."

I wrote that at noon, in baby's room, beside his little bed. Nurse was reading. The doctor was to return at about five o'clock, and I impatiently awaited his coming, although I knew in advance he would say: "Nothing new yet; we must wait." In fact there was no change. The skin was still without eruption, though moist with perspiration. The

child groaned in his restless slumber. When one touched him to arrange his bedclothes, he cried, and seemed very irritable.

Toward four o'clock some one knocked. It was Joseph, my husband's valet. Oh! I detest those impenetrable eyes, that mouth with its invisible lips, that cunning and hostile face!

"What is it, Joseph?"

"Monsieur le Comte wishes to know if Monsieur le Vicomte is any better."

(Monsieur le Vicomte is René, my adored vicomte.)

"Has not Monsieur le Comte gone out yet?"

"No, madame. Monsieur le Comte remained in his room after lunch. He begs madame to let him know when the doctor will come to see Monsieur le Vicomte."

"Very well, Joseph. Nurse will let Monsieur le Comte know."

So my husband had not gone out; he was anxious concerning baby; he wished to be present at the doctor's visit. Was he to be believed? This solicitude importuned me. So much rancor had gathered within me that I no longer wanted Raoul to show affection to my son. I wanted him to leave me alone with the dear little invalid and to go to that other creature's house. What wretched pride! But I have suffered so much!

The doctor arrived a little after five. Summoned by the nurse, the count at once came upstairs, and seemed so forlorn, and so different from the energetic, strong-minded, and determined-looking man he usually is, that I knew at once he was worried too. He was evidently suffering. A struggle had begun within him

between that real generosity that made him a general favorite, and the evil promptings of his caprices.

“Nothing new yet; we must wait.” These words, which I had anticipated, were said as the doctor replaced the baby’s dishevelled head on the pillow, and while the little fellow murmured:

“Baby’s head, dottor baby’s head!”

And he tapped his forehead with his little fists to show where it hurt him.

“We must wait . . . and be ready for anything. The crisis is approaching. Something will develop this evening, or to-night at the latest. Some illness is brooding in the child, otherwise the fever would not persist as it does. Have you a good physician in your neighborhood?”

“Why?”

"For to-night, for an emergency."

"There is a physician in the place Beauvau, a Doctor Guil."

"Oh, yes, a young man; very intelligent too. I know him. I will drop him a note. Let him be called, at no matter what hour, if there is any change."

The doctor left, and Raoul and I remained alone for some time. I affected to pay no attention to his presence. I came and went in the room without looking at him or speaking to him. He said finally, in a voice that sounded false:

"I will dine home this evening, Genevieve."

I read his conscience as if it were an open book. He was thinking: "It is cowardly to leave Genevieve all alone at such a time as this. We'll come to an understanding. I will dine home to-night—one of those

tête-à-tête dinners she is so fond of. Afterwards, when I have done my duty, I can go to the rue Vézelay."

The evening before, the proposition to dine at home with Raoul, "like lovers" as we used to say, would have made me jump with joy and have put me in my husband's power again. But my anxiety and my suspicions had changed me.

"Dine home if you want to," I answered coldly. "I shall not come down. Besides, I have no appetite."

If he had doubted up to then that I was aware of his treason, his doubt ceased at that moment. He grew pale and his mouth contracted. I felt he was hesitating: "Shall I confess and ask her pardon?" But the evil influence was again the stronger. He contented himself by saying:

"Very well, as you wish."

I was standing before baby's bed, and the child was hidden by my gown. Raoul did not dare approach, and, after a short hesitation, he left the room.

And so the slow hours so heavy with anguish, beside the moaning child, began over again. Every minute I arose and bent over him; I examined his face and limbs. His skin was growing redder and more feverish; but still there was no eruption. Toward eight o'clock baby awoke suddenly and called for his playthings. I made him understand he must not touch them, so as not to uncover his arms and chest. He consented to watch me play with them instead. With an aching heart I drew the strings of the punchinello and played with the locomotive. About nine o'clock he fell into a very heavy sleep

again, and seeing him quiet, I also went to sleep.

A slight noise awoke me. I perceived my husband bending over René's bed and examining him closely by the light of a candle. He was dressed as if about to go out, in patent leathers and full-dress trousers; only he had a house coat lined with blue flannel over his white waistcoat. I looked at the clock; it was twenty minutes after nine.

"He is going out," I thought. "In half an hour he will be with that woman."

For a moment the project of going and waiting for him in front of his mistress's door, recurred to my mind. But it was only for a moment.

"No . . . my place is not there. . . . It is here."

And I offered to God, sincerely and

entirely, the sacrifice of my pride, of all my affection as a loving woman, that my son might be saved.

Suddenly Raoul cried:

“Genevieve!”

I arose. . . . It concerned baby, I was sure. All anger was banished from my mind in a second.

“What? What is the matter?”

“Look.”

By the lamplight he pointed out dull red spots as large as lentils, that were beginning to mark the infant's face and arms. Raising the coverlid, we examined the rest of the body. The rash was all over.

I was insane with fear.

“My God! my God!” I stammered. “What is it? Is it not smallpox? Tell me, Raoul.”

Forgetting everything, I took my husband's hands and clasped them.

"Stay here, Genevieve," he said.
"I will go and fetch the doctor."

Ah! what a time it took before he returned! Nurse and I, both distracted, walked up and down the room, watching at the windows to hear the sound of the carriages. One moment I went into the adjoining nursery, knelt down, and asked God to pardon my unchristian-like sentiments of the afternoon. I renewed the vow, if baby got well, to bear my husband's treason with resignation.

At last the count returned, very much agitated, bringing with him Doctor Guil, a tall young man with a pale face and large, high forehead, who immediately set to work to examine René. Raoul and I looked at each other, and stood side by side, our arms entwined, like two children who are afraid of the dark.

Five minutes passed; yes, five min-

utes, a century! before Doctor Guil decided to speak.

"Well, doctor?" asked the count.

"Well! I do not think it is serious. But I am not yet sure. The eruption is not yet characteristic."

"But is it smallpox?" I gasped. .

"Oh, no! it is certainly not smallpox."

He said it very simply—that "it is certainly not smallpox." And I fell into Raoul's arms, completely unstrung. How happy I was! An absolute confidence took possession of me now. I felt myself mysteriously exalted. There was no longer any danger. I heard the words . . . "roseola" "varicella" . . . spoken. Then I had a fit of weeping and lost consciousness. They had to put me to bed.

The nights are short at this time of the year, and I regained conscious-

ness at daybreak. I immediately asked Raoul (without expressing my astonishment at finding him at my bedside): "How is René?"

"René is getting along very well," he said, coming closer to me. "It is only a varicella. The eruption is now plainly visible. Our little boy is very ugly to look at; but there is no longer any danger. Nurse is with him and so is Kate. And you, how are you?"

"I? I am very well."

I tried to rise, but I was so weak and fatigued that I sank back on my pillow.

"Poor child!" said Raoul, taking my hand.

There was a silence, during which I thought:

"As Raoul is here now he must have returned from the rue Vézelay—or perhaps he did not go out at all."

I could not resist asking him:

“What time did you come in, Raoul?”

“Why, I came in with the doctor. From the time you were put to bed I have remained here with you.”

He put his face close to mine. I murmured:

“Then——”

He understood me, and answered in a low voice:

“Then . . . I love only you. . . . You must forgive me.”

Never, since our engagement, did we exchange such a kiss as that!

Three weeks have passed. We were able to remove baby last Thursday. We are at Talloires, in our country home, where we go every year. *Some one* showed me a certain note received at Paris the day following the *terrible night*, and it read:

"I waited yesterday, for two hours, in a horrid room. I do not like ill-bred people. Adieu.—Suze."

As for Mlle. de Giverney, it is very funny. . . . She got married.

Master Baby is handsomer than ever. The eruptions left no marks, save one little triangular pit on his right temple, which he will bear, it seems, all his life.

"That will not prevent his being a handsome fellow," said Doctor Robin to me, "or from making conquests, like his father."

Like his father! God grant he may make a few less!

For the time being my hero does not dream of the fair sex. He is delighted with a live rabbit that his father has given him; he also bestows his coquetties on the little donkey that our servants use every morning

in going to get the provisions from Annecy. That donkey and rabbit occupy his entire thoughts, and I have been unable to prevent him from modifying his evening prayer thus:

“ Dood Jees . . . heart . . .
to serve you and dro. . . . Give
health to tata, to moomie . . .
my rabbit and donkey . . . to
nurse. . . . ‘Men!’ ”

What a little treasure! . . .

Military Service.

MADAME COUTELIER TO MONSIEUR
COUTELIER.

April 4.

You cannot imagine, beloved one, how dreary it is to be alone with the servant and how depressed and melancholy I feel! To think that you've been gone only two days and that you must be away from me twenty-six more, even twenty-seven, counting the day you spend on the train! The Government is really unreasonable! It's a shame to tear a darling husband away from his little wifie three months after his marriage. And what's the good of it all, I should like

to know. Why should you be out there at Brest practising the goosestep in the infantry when I'm all alone in Paris? Besides, how horrible having to do your twenty-eight days at Brest! It would not have been so bad when you were living in Bretagne with your mother. But now that you have your Paris position—really, dearest, it is simply absurd! I am not surprised that so many people are dissatisfied with the Republic.

You know that easy chair in your study? The poor, dear thing feels as lonely and as miserable as I do. It told me so. We had a chat together yesterday afternoon. I feel hysterical when I look at it.

Your office friend Simon came to see me. He says you asked him to come to see me from time to time, to cheer me up and to tell me all the office gossip, which I was to write

to you afterwards. He was very nice and is a perfect gentleman. But when I heard him talk about the other clerks and the news—just as you used to—it so upset me that I began to cry as if my heart would break. Poor Simon was dreadfully embarrassed. I don't think he will come very often. His first visit could not have been very agreeable.

Farewell, my sweetheart, my beloved one. Your little wife kisses you fervently on each tip of your lovely mustache. Now she is going to bed, and will try to dream of her absent Jacques.

CHARLOTTE.

P. S.—I have just received a letter from your mother. She tells me that she wants you to go and spend a week with her when you have finished your

military service. I won't hear of it. What an idea!

April 12 (fragment).

. . . I try vainly to overcome my insomnia by reading. But you know that I am not very fond of books. They only make my eyes smart without making me sleepy. Besides, when I read about people loving and kissing each other I think of us, and it makes me cry.

Goodness ! How large our bed seems now I am all alone!

Your friend Simon still comes to see me. He calls now every two days. It gives me great pleasure to speak with him about you, but between ourselves, dear, don't you think that these frequent visits to a young wife are rather imprudent? Of course I don't

mean as far as I am concerned! The man who could make me forget my Jacquot is not yet born. But I mean on his account. You know Simon is a bachelor. He is young and I am not ugly. For some time I have noticed him making strange eyes at me. It would be dreadful if he were to become unhappy on our account. Write me what I must do and I will do it.

P. S.—I don't want to appear disagreeable, but really, dearest, your mother is most selfish. What's to prevent her from going to see you at Brest? She'll see you every day after your service ends.

CHARLOTTE.

April 16 (fragment).

That wasn't very kind of you to tell

me that every woman imagines that a man has only to see her to fall in love with her. I assure you that your friend Simon is absolutely smitten. You know how perfectly safe I am, but what's the good of letting the poor man waste his time? Wouldn't it be kinder to ask him in a very nice way not to call? But I'll do as you say.

I am still troubled with insomnia and with my nerves. I have no more appetite. Nothing tempts me. It is dreadfully monotonous in the house, and yet I can't make up my mind to go out. Oh, come back quickly to me, my adored one! I can't live without you! If you went to spend a week with your mother after your service—well, when you returned to Paris you wouldn't find your little Charlotte. I should be dead, dead from grief. So you understand, you

mustn't go to your mother's. Will you promise me?

• • • •

April 17.

I beseech you, if this note reaches you in time, to allow me to tell your friend Simon not to call again. He has never been impertinent with me, but, really, his eyes frighten me. I can't help thinking that he is planning something. Now, when he is in the drawing room with me, I always have the girl stay in the dining room with the door open.

Your

CHARLOTTE.

April 22 (fragment).

So now, dear, you understand, don't you, and you're no longer vexed at not having received a letter for three days? If you only knew how unhappy I have been these last three days! Oh, *for no reason*, of course. I don't know what it was—the bad weather or what—but I cried and cried, and I couldn't make up my mind to write to you.

Come back quickly, dearest. We shall still be happy together. Write me in your next letter that we shall still be as happy together as we were before you went away.

A thousand kisses from your
CHARLOTTE.

P. S.—I have raised the girl's wages ten francs a month. You remember

we spoke about doing it last month; and she has been very good since you left. She's an excellent servant.

April 27 (fragment).

. . . . Another letter from your mother. The poor woman insists on having you a week to herself before she dies, as she puts it. Her letter quite touched me. I myself have suffered so much from your absence that I can understand what she must feel at not having seen you for so long. Do just as you like, dear. If your mother died, I should not like to have it on my conscience that I had kept you from her.

. . . . Yes, you were quite right. Your friend Simon was not in love

with me at all. He has even confessed to me that he thinks of getting married. That was what made him act so strangely.

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May 4 (fragment).

. . . . Besides, I am much better than I was. Now that I know that you are with your dear mother I am far easier. When you were at Brest, and I thought of your evenings spent with men who might lead you into temptation, I imagined a number of dreadful things. I was jealous. But now you're in the country with your mother, I am more comfortable. I prefer that you should prolong your present visit rather than leave me again to see her.

Farewell, loved one. Kiss your

dear mother for me, and think of the little wife who adores you.

CHARLOTTE.

P. S.—You reproach me for not saying any more about your friend Simon. Dear me, how interested you are in our friend Simon! Well, your friend Simon is perfectly well. I see him from time to time, but not nearly as frequently as formerly. To think that at one time I thought he was in love with me! How foolish we women are! Don't say anything about it to your mother, will you, dear?

Expiation.

SISTER LOUISE DE MARNE TO MON-
SIEUR DE VAUBERT, LIEUTENANT
OF THE 18TH CHASSEURS.

Where will this letter, written from my first convent cell (I finished my noviciate to-day), find you, dear friend? Separated from the world for a year, I do not know where you are. I have closed my ears to every echo from outside these walls. I have lived without news from my father, my sisters, and you, my dear Hector, whom I have so dearly loved! The irrevocable vows are now pronounced, and in my new condition I summon up courage to write you a

few lines of explanation and farewell which are due to you. I cannot put any other address—not knowing any other—than the number of your regiment. If God is willing, my letter will reach you.

I have loved you well, Hector. I have loved you more passionately and for a longer time than you think. Do you remember when we were children together, playing the same games at your house or mine? Our parents used to say then, half in jest and perhaps without meaning it themselves: "They'll make a nice couple one of these days." Those words, which you did not understand, or hardly understood, I took seriously. They made a profound impression on the keener sensibilities of the young girl. Yes, from that time you became the centre of my heart. If you did not notice then my submissive tenderness, my

happy embarrassment when I was with you, it was because you did not pay much attention to me.

We grew up. Our amusements, formerly sought together, now separated us. The college took you and the convent took me. When away from me confess, Hector, that you rarely gave me a thought. I, when away from you, thought of you only. I took every opportunity to lead my dreams towards you. If one of our elder girls left the convent to be married, I said to myself: "One day I will leave, too, to marry Hector!" Each time that the word "love" occurred in a hymn or in one of those innocent novels that they let us read, I felt my heart thrill delightfully, for love, dear, meant you for me, you alone; the word had no meaning outside of you. Ah! of how many communions have I partaken with that one prayer on

my lips: "O, God! grant that I may marry Hector!" To marry you, for me, meant merely to live near you, to be tied to you all my life!

The years went by like this, and we rarely saw each other. You, always handsome and charming in my eyes, in the little cap and blue uniform worn at the Jesuit school; I, a lanky, pale-faced growing girl, ashamed at feeling, in your presence, so ugly, awkward, and timid. When you began your second year at St. Cyr I was about to leave the convent and make my debut in society.

Now that I am only a poor nun, stripped of all her former elegance and feminine vanity, I may say what a triumph that debut was. I do not remember meeting the eyes of a woman without reading in them admiration and jealousy, nor the eyes of a man without seeing them flash. I was

proud and happy at this homage to my beauty—but only on your account, my dear Hector, and because it reassured me. I thought: “When Hector sees me again he will think me beautiful and he will love me.” I swear to God that my success in society never gave me any other joy.

The winter was soon over, and then came spring. In July—fifteen days after you left St. Cyr—you came to the Chateau de Brien, my father’s residence, my home.

Ah, my beloved! God has given me strength to give up the world, to abandon all hope of being your wife, of being the mother of your children, but He has not yet given me the strength to hate (as I should hate the beginning of my sin) those hours and days that followed our meeting. In spite of myself my memory makes constantly that pilgrimage of tender-

ness. I live over once more the moment that I tremblingly entered the drawing room where I saw you, still dusty from your journey, talking with my father. I recall your expression of surprise on seeing me, the embarrassment in your gestures, your voice, and your look. I remember how it reassured me, and made a voice within me cry: "He thinks me beautiful! He will love me!" I see once more the delightful days that followed, when we explored our souls, so to speak, in constant companionship, while our eyes gradually resumed the childish expression that the mask of years had concealed; then the stammered declarations, the unfinished phrases murmured half inaudibly, that touching of our hands which sufficed to increase the beating of our hearts.

Alas! I loved you too well! Even in these still innocent moments of ten-

derness I already belonged to you. Could I deny you anything that would make you happy? Could I imagine that to yield to one of your wishes was wrong? Thus were we without defence the one against the other—you young, inexperienced, eager with passion; I innocent, confiding, conquered in advance.

What was to happen did happen. Who was to blame? Was it you, who—unnerved after the sisterly good-night kiss given a few moments before—came on that August night and knocked at my closed door? Was it I, who innocently opened the door directly I heard you say “It is I, Louise”? Or was nature the real culprit—the beautiful autumn night that wafted to us, through the open windows, the sweet breath of the fragrant park, the rustling of the fallen leaves, the monotonous wash of

the lake, each of those sounds of a summer's evening that recall a tender word, a pressure of the hands, a kiss? Ah, yes, I sinned, but not more then than the evening, or in the days before, or ever since the time of our childhood.

It was only when I found myself alone, when the ghostly light of the new day crept in through the shutters, that the scales fell from my eyes and that I saw my sin in its true light.

I sobbed out loud, my face buried in my hands, "I am his mistress, his MISTRESS!" And the word grew, shone like a torch, and illuminated all the things I did not know before—all the mysteries of human love, all that is hidden from young girls. Yes, I was your mistress—that is to say something definite—and I could never be anything else to you. I was something contrary to what since my child-

hood I had dreamed of being: your wife. It was all so clear to me. I knew I had just dispelled my dream and rendered it unrealizable forever. "It is all over," I thought. "I cannot marry him now." Oh, understand me well, Hector. Not for a moment did I conceive a doubt of your loyalty. I was certain, and I am certain now, that you would not have tried to avoid doing your duty, and that you yourself would have said: "Be my wife!" But that could not be. I had never formed but one wish —to give you in myself the most beautiful, the most affectionate, and, above all, the most chaste of wives. And all that was now impossible, since I had already surrendered myself. I could only offer you a soiled body and a withered soul; I could only be in your eyes a wife *less pure than others!*

I do myself the credit to say that my resolution was immediate and firm. I said to myself: "I will not be Hector's wife." There was an alternative—I ask God's pardon and your own, for it tempted me for a moment—should I be your mistress? It was neither my conscience, nor the thought of the sorrow I should cause my parents, that restrained me, nor the opinion of the world. It was again thoughts of you, the thought that one day, dear, you would despise me. I was very sure that at first you would not blame me, for you had taken me innocent and defenceless, and I knew you blamed yourself. But later, when I gave way a second time, when what had been a surprise became a custom, a manner of living deliberately accepted by me—then you would despise me in your heart.

By an act of supreme mercy God

inspired me, and helped me to see clear as the sunlight that was gilding the trees of the park. I must flee, I must cease seeing you—the first sin must forever be the only one.

You know the rest, dear friend—my flight from Brien at daybreak, my voluntary sequestration in this convent, and the fruitlessness of all the attempts made to make me change my decision.

An entire year has gone by since then. All is ended now, ended without hope of return. Nothing remains of the Louisette of the old days; if you saw me now you would hardly recognize me, so much has my sorrow changed me. My life will end here peacefully and sadly. I will pray God to give you soon the beautiful, pure, and affectionate wife that I once dreamed to be. It was in order to obtain this mercy that I expiate here

our mutual sin; for I still love you, my adored one! I do not reproach you; you were no more to blame than I was myself. When you think of me, and later when you are with your wife and children, I do not wish you to have any remorse. Only remember kindly her who for love of you gave you all her whole being, heart, and body, and who was not able to refuse you anything because she loved you too well, and who later did not think she had the right to become your wife, also because she loved you too well.

“The Little Bordeaux Man.”

MADEMOISELLE ETIENNE LECLERC
(FOURTEEN YEARS OLD) TO MADE-
MOISELLE CLEMENTINE JONASSIER
(THE SAME AGE).

You must not scold me, Clemmie, darling, if I have not written you since the distribution of prizes at the Conservatoire, when we both had such attacks of hysterics, thanks to the behavior of the awarding jury. What utterly heartless creatures those men must be to make such pretty girls as us cry! Well, I hope you are over your mortification by this time; I am.

A prize more or less is not worth a moment's worry, particularly as I am convinced that neither your future nor mine lays in the piano.

Where was I? Oh, yes, I said that I was not able to write to you sooner. This has been owing to our having to go on the road with the Machard Company. The tour began at the same time as the holidays, and you know that one of its most distinguished members is the "eminent prima donna" Fausta Leclerc, my sister. My mother travels with her, of course; she says she has to for the sake of propriety, but that depends on the point of view, does it not? The truth is, Fausta's temper has never enabled her to keep a maid twenty-four hours; mamma is the only one who can put up with her. As to myself, they took me along too, because they couldn't leave me in the street

probably. But they never neglect an opportunity to remind me that I cost a good deal and am earning nothing. I have to travel third class with mamma, while Fausta has a luxurious parlor car.

We have already done Orleans (an awfully dull place), Angoulême (awfully jolly), Bordeaux, and Toulouse. Oh, Bordeaux is a sweet place! Lots of men, dresses, and shops, and a theatre as big as the Paris Bourse. And all the cocottes, my dear, have their private residences on the Boulevard de Canderan! How I should love to live there! The town is full of young men. They say they sell wine. That is perhaps true, but if they do they get up during the night to sell it, for all day and evening they are amusing themselves.

One of these remarkable wine merchants is named Julien Colayrac. He

is twenty-seven years old, but looks nineteen. He is as sweet as a cupid, literally stuffed with money, and fell in love with the "eminent prima donna" during one of the performances of *Le Roi d'Ys*.

As we have to follow father Ma-chard whether we like it or not (fifty thousand francs forfeit—phew!), Fausta brought her sweetheart with her to Toulouse, where we are for the present. All together—Fausta, mamma, I, and he—we make a nice little party of four. Meantime, the wines of the Julien Colayrac brand continue to be sold and delivered free anywhere in the country, in casks or in bottles. Who sells them? Heaven alone knows!

Now, you have probably noticed already that my dear elder sister is horribly jealous of me. It's all very well her repeating constantly that I

am a kid, that my hands are red, that I am flat-chested, that I have a big mouth, etc. She is compelled to admit *in petto* that I am already better looking than she is, and that annoys her. You have no idea how that vexes her!

Since "the little Bordeaux man" (that's what mamma calls young Colayrac) has been with us Fausta was very nasty to me. All the time she makes such unkind remarks as these in front of him: "That kid is as flat as an ironing board," or "That kid combs herself with a nail," or "That kid dresses like a gypsy." I'd just like to see the dresses that the "eminent prima donna" wore at my age. I finally grew very tired of this teasing, and about a week ago I took my dear sister aside, and the following conversation passed between us:

"Do you intend to go on making

fun of me before 'the little Bordeaux man'?"

"I intend doing just what I please."

"So you'll continue?"

"Yes, I will."

"Are you so afraid that he'll notice I am better looking than you?"

(Here my dear sister affected the greatest amusement.)

"Better looking than me? I should pity his taste. Do you suppose any one notices such a kid as you?"

"If I took it into my head to steal your 'little Bordeaux man' it wouldn't be difficult."

"Very well; try."

"Very well, I will."

After that conversation my sister naturally ill-treated me more than ever before Julien. I put up with everything with the resignation of an angel, and affected the greatest sadness, as if I had a secret sorrow.

From time to time at table when "the little Bordeaux man" looked at me, he found my eyes fixed on his (my virginal glances that we used to amuse ourselves in casting at poor Ambroise at the Conservatoire to disturb his nights). Directly he looked I quickly cast down my eyes, as if I had been caught in the act of adoring him. This ended by interesting the young man. I also adopted other and more material means to interest him—means that were easy, since we lived under the same roof. I would fasten my garters when I knew he was looking, and show myself with my hair down (you know how pretty my hair is). And once I let Julien catch a glimpse of me as I was undressing. It seemed to have a marvellous effect on him. He stopped a moment to look. I could see him in the glass without his knowledge.

He began to bite in earnest. He no longer dared to kiss my sister before me. The poor man seemed embarrassed and preoccupied. Then each evening, while Fausta was on the stage, he came to me in the dressing room and behind the wings. He could talk more freely, not being intimidated by Fausta, and as to mamma, she is hypnotized all the time her daughter is singing. You could stick pins into her and she would feel nothing. One night he began to question me, asking me why I was sad, and paying me compliments. I replied with sighs and monosyllables, and sometimes by a furtive tear that I managed to squeeze out. I ended by confessing the cause of my secret chagrin, and, dear me, how I fooled the poor man! I said in substance that I was very unhappy at home, not because they dressed me like a Cin-

derella and made me run all kinds of errands and gave me more cuffs than pocket money, but because I was disgusted with my sister's mode of life and the complacency of my mother—complacency that was repugnant to my ideas of what was right. I was determined, I told him, to leave them as soon as possible and to take refuge in a convent, for which I felt I was intended.

"A convent!" "the little Bordeaux man" exclaimed. "Do you want to renounce the world? Don't you love any one?"

"Yes, indeed," I replied. "I love some one—but he doesn't love me."

As I said this I fixed my virginal eyes on his. He understood me and took me in his arms. He covered me with kisses and declared that my scruples honored me. He said he wished to be instrumental in my re-

demption, and that he would put me in a convent to finish my education, and that all he would ask was that I should love him a little, as he adored me.

"But what about Fausta?" I sighed.

"Fausta? Why, she is not worthy to unfasten your shoes, my child. Fausta is a pastime for me. I have never taken her seriously."

This little scene took place in the dressing room of the "eminent prima donna," who was singing *Brunhild* in "Sigurd." She has to return to her dressing room to change her costume, and she came in just as "the little Bordeaux man"—doubtless with the view of beginning my redemption without delay—was growing enterprising.

You can imagine the scene that followed: Rage of *Brunhild*, attack of

hysterics, arrival post-haste of mamma, the stage manager frantically calling "Madame Fausta! En scene! Quick!" Fausta replying in a brief and classic phrase, while on the stage *Sigurd*, chagrined at *Brunhild's* protracted absence, coming off after saying to the audience: "I can't imagine what the woman's about!" The Toulouse people, as you know, are hot-headed. They became angry, and the manager was obliged to lower the curtain.

Afterwards, of course, everything was made all right. Fausta and Julien were reconciled. Mamma gave me a spanking when we got home, but such a spanking as I never had before. I didn't care; I had my money's worth. The "eminent prima donna" no longer annoys me about my uncombed hair, my flat chest, or my red hands. And mamma often pulls my

ear when she is in a good humor and says, as if pleased: "This kid already does what she likes with the men! Aren't you ashamed, at your age? At least wait till you're sixteen!"

As to Julien, he has promised Fausta and mamma to be good. But he often snatches a kiss in the dark.

It's great fun.

Conciliation.

MADAME ARDEVILLE TO MADAME
DUMOUSTIER.

Ah, my dear, what a lot has happened in my poor, little life during the past month! I feel all topsy-turvy, and at times hardly know whether I am awake or deep in the most complicated nightmare. In the morning when I open my eyes, still half asleep, I think to myself: At last . . . I'm divorced . . . I'm all alone . . . all alone. I lazily stretch and yawn, and encounter—my husband's arm or shoulder or some other portion of his person. My husband's, do you hear? Yes, there has been a reconciliation. I certainly never ex-

pected it! Six weeks of freedom and here I am again, bound by all my wifely duties. At heart I am not sorry, because I am very fond of Paul. But it was very pleasant to be free; I was just beginning to really enjoy it. Because, you know, duty and principle are everything with me. A married woman must not permit any one to kiss her. A divorced woman or a widow can permit anything, is perfectly free. My freedom was of brief duration, but I can conscientiously say that I profited by it fully.

You know, Alice, dear, what a good wife I am—a little wild, perhaps, but I am sure a more virtuous woman does not exist, and I belong to the best category of faithful wives—those who are virtuous in spite of themselves; those who say to themselves, "So and so is very nice, but it's no use. I cannot deceive my husband." Perhaps it's

silly to be so particular, seeing that so many married women have adventures and yet seem to get along with their husbands; but that's how I am. Besides, I liked Paul. He was very fond of me, and proved it in a hundred little ways. Were we not a happy little household? All the trouble was caused by my sister. A sister fifteen years older than one's self, living with one, is worse than two mothers-in-law. Of course poor Annette did not mean to make mischief, but continually seeing us kissing each other when she had nothing to kiss except her holy medallions, made her sour. She seemed to age five years during the first year of our marriage. At last Paul said to me:

“Your sister is becoming unbearable. We must find a husband for her.”

The very idea of finding a husband

for Annette was comical to a degree. Some persons really seem as if they belonged to another sex—an uncompanionable sex. Yet, on thinking it over, I came to the conclusion that it was the best thing we could do.

"I have a man," declared Paul solemnly. "You'll see. Annette is a fright, but she has money. Let me arrange the matter."

He spoke to my sister about his plan. She thought at first that he was joking, but when she saw he was serious, she displayed so much emotion and bewilderment, mingled with genuine joy, that Paul was touched. The next day he brought the suitor to lunch. I expected to see a ridiculous-looking dotard, but, on the contrary, the man was about thirty, broad-shouldered, intelligent, and well dressed. He was a clerk at Paul's bank.

"He is ambitious and intelligent, but is handicapped for want of money. He'll do all right," said Paul.

In fact, he "did all right." All that week, and the following week, he paid Annette a daily visit. Annette was radiant, but in a way that did not add to her beauty. All was arranged. The engagement was about to be announced, when one fine morning my husband receives a letter from the gentleman. He was not all right, after all. "His slender means . . . the difference in age might cause comment . . . should never forget." In brief, he beat a retreat.

"He's an imbecile," said Paul angrily. "I'll kick him out of the bank."

He did as he threatened; but would you believe it, dear, my sister made Paul responsible for her mortification? She accused him of having brought

the man to the house for the purpose of making her ridiculous. She never had great love for him, but now she began to hate him. She had always advised me to mistrust him. She said he was certainly unfaithful to me, visiting so many actresses as he did under the cloak of business. I shrugged my shoulders and laughed. I trusted him. So do you know what she did? She wrote to a detective agency, and they watched Paul. They found that he went every evening and spent an hour in a ground floor apartment in the rue Bassano. Annette so excited me when informing me of her discovery that I ended by consenting to a trap being laid, into which my husband fell. I obtained possession of two most compromising letters. I, out of sheer good nature, might have forgiven him, but my sister would not hear

of it. She brought it to an open quarrel, and I began divorce proceedings.

I thought it was just as easy to get a divorce as to get a box for the theatre. Ah, my dear, never begin a divorce suit. You have no idea of all they've invented to disgust people with it. You have to see an attorney, then an advocate, then the presiding justice—a host of people that take up your whole time. What complicated the thing was that my husband, very craftily, began divorce proceedings against me at the same time. Annette, fearing we should come to an understanding, had made me leave home, and we took lodgings in the rue de Varenne, in a kind of religious retreat for women only, kept by sisters of charity. The "retreat" reeked with ennui and utter dreariness, but boasted of its thorough respectability.

The place also made a specialty of fashionable divorces. When I was there we were six buried in divorce proceedings, four young women and two old ones. You should have heard us pull the men to pieces when we all six began to talk of them. I am sure any young girl staying in that retreat for a week, would make a vow to remain single all her life. Yet, the old women wanted to get married again. They had suitors in view.

It was the mother superior who recommended the attorney and the advocate, who are attached to the "retreat" like lay almoners, as it were. The attorney was named Cartelier, a blond giant with the drooping mustachios of a Gallic chieftain; you know how I adore that style of man, Alice! (Do you remember at the convent how crazy I was with Eugenie's brother?) As for the lawyer

—no! guess. Darthenay, my Darthenay—our Darthenay, if you like, for he was attentive to you, too, at Etretat. When I entered his office he was quite upset with emotion. “What! . . . You . . . you, Blanche?” (Toward the end of my stay at Etretat, after you had already gone, he had fallen into the bad habit of calling me Blanche.) He took both my hands and kissed them. I was a little moved, too, you know, but, however, I was cold and dignified. “I come here on business, Monsieur. Mother Eucharis recommended you to me.”

Darthenay started.

“Mother Eucharis? . . . Then you want a divorce?”

“Precisely.”

I am sure an adverb never confused a lawyer so much before. Before I had time to think, my Darthenay (our Darthenay, I beg your pardon) seized

my hands again, and covered my face and neck with kisses, exclaiming:

“Divorced! Oh! Blanche, dearest Blanche, how glad I am! How glad I am! I still adore you, you know!”

He tried to convince me, and, after my recent widowhood, his ardor disturbed me more than it did at Etre-tat. At one time I nearly lost my self-possession; I murmured the supreme defence that up to then had always guarded my honor under similar circumstances: “Remember, I am married.”

“Nonsense!” he replied immediately. “You are separated!”

Ah! I had not anticipated that argument. I was powerless, vanquished by mere logic, by mere reasoning. “It is true,” I thought to myself, “I am not Paul’s wife. I owe him no duty. How can I resist now?

Let me think." Think, indeed ! While I was thinking he was demonstrating. . . . When he had exhausted his arguments, I was so confused at having found no reply that I began to weep. Darthenay consoled me gently and courteously, so nicely and tenderly, in fact, that I at once thought: "He is the husband I need." I never know how to dissimulate my impressions, and I said to him:

" You must marry me, Henri."

He did not seem very much surprised.

" Certainly," he replied. " You are the ideal woman for an ardent, intelligent man (that's him; he is evidently pleased with himself)—pretty, stylish, intelligent, and rather amorous."

I lowered my eyes.

" Well, then, as soon as I am divorced—" I said.

" Certainly. Only—"

“ Only what? ”

“ I am married! ”

It was a hard blow, I assure you.
I expected anything except that.

“ You have not acted like a gentleman, Monsieur. A woman’s feelings should not be played with in this manner. After having told me at Etretat that you adored me, you immediately went and married. You do not love me.”

I was very much pained. Darthenay described to me the despair my refusal had plunged him into. “ I felt I was dealing with a good woman—that I had not the slightest chance. I sought forgetfulness.”

“ Very well,” I said. “ Get a divorce yourself, and we will marry.”

“ That is a good idea,” he replied. “ I will look into it. First, though, we will get your divorce settled, so as not to complicate matters. One

month will be time enough. Mean-time, when may I see you again?"

I pretended I did not understand.

" You will see my attorney."

" D—— your attorney. You, Blanche . . . you, my beloved, when?"

He exacted a promise from me in return for a solemn promise on his part of good behavior. As he showed me out, he asked:

" By the way, who is your attorney?"

" Wait till I see. . . . Mother Eucharis wrote it on a bit of paper. . . . Maître Cartelier."

He seemed displeased.

" Cartelier! Always Cartelier! I am always warning Mother Eucharis, but she persists. Will you take my advice? Do not go to Cartelier."

" Why not?"

" Because he is not a proper man

for a young and pretty woman like you to know. His reputation is very bad."

"In what way?"

"He compromises his lady clients."

"Don't you?"

"I—no, I don't make a practice of it. Besides, I am a gentleman. Cartelier is a brute."

He pressed me in his arms to prove how gentle he was. As I went down the staircase, he repeated:

"Do not go to him; he is a brute."

What would you have done, Alice? You would have gone straight to Cartelier, to prove to yourself that a good woman need never fear a man's brutality. I had the good sense to return to the convent, to defer the visit to the following day, and consult Mother Eucharis again. And it was on the reiterated affirmation of that venerable dame, that Cartelier was the

"most energetic" advocate in Paris (she repeated it two or three times), that I decided to ignore Darthenay's advice.

As soon as I was in the attorney's presence I saw why he had the reputation of being a ladies' man. The true type of the blond Gaul and an improvement on Eugenie's brother. And such eyes! two blue opaque stones that look at you without your being able to see anything in them. What a pity for such a man to be an attorney! He should have been an actor or an artist. I told him so—not at first, but later. Let me tell you what took place.

To begin with, nothing happened as I had feared. Cartelier's behavior showed indifference if anything. He a brute! Yes, a little; he was not even amiable, but a very bright man. In a quarter of an hour he had learned

everything about my case, and he summed it up in telegraphic language: "Husband rather loose in morals, but kind at home. Sister sour—it was she who urged you on. Not very anxious at first. Decided now to go on to the end? Is that it?" Yes, it was. That was all. I could go.

Why should I deny it? I was a little disappointed. One does not like to screw one's courage up to the topmost notch and then to find out that there had been no danger after all. Had Darthenay lied? Of course I had not tried to make an impression on my attorney, but it is disagreeable to feel that you are uncongenial to people whom you like.

On my return to the convent I discreetly turned the conversation of my co-divorcées to M. Cartelier. All spoke eulogistically of his ability, and

all repeated Mother Eucharis' expression: "He's exceedingly energetic." But when I tried to make them speak of his qualities as a man, I noticed blushes and considerable embarrassment. "So, so," I thought, "can the boor have insulted them all except me?" A certain Mme. de Saint-Mandé, a timid little brunette, who was getting a divorce for the most ridiculous reasons, convinced me. I took her aside and complained about Cartelier in a way to make her think he had taken the greatest liberties with me. The little minx confessed blushingly that Cartelier had also treated her shamefully.

You can understand that I could not let the matter rest like that. Under a pretext I returned to the attorney's, determined to solve the problem. You can imagine what self-control I had to exert in order to be

pleasant to the blond giant whom I began to detest. I was agreeable, of course, and perhaps I let him think I was interested in him. While looking over his shoulder to read some documents, my face happened to touch his mustache. It was only an instant, less than a second, but it had the effect of an electric shock on him. Oh, my dear, how terrible! It just shows how careful a good woman should be when in such brutal men's company. Yes, brutal, that's just the word. A perfect brute! And I told him so when I left his office a few moments later. Would you believe that he shrugged his shoulders and calmly went on turning his papers over?

I need hardly tell you that I never go to see him now unless it is absolutely imperative. There was still some one I had to see—the presiding justice, who later was to act as medi-

ator. Distrustful after my recent experiences, I consulted the little Mme. de Saint-Mandé, whose case was before mine on the calendar.

"Oh, he's not very dangerous," she said. "Firstly, he's no longer young. He's very gallant and fond of paying compliments, but like an old man. Let him do what he likes. Be sure and be amiable with him, for he could easily prevent you getting your divorce. . . ."

So I was amiable with the presiding justice, M. de la Coudraie. He was a stout little man, not too fat, a rather florid face, flanked by very bushy brown whiskers. During our conversation the magistrate appeared exclusively interested in the most embarrassing talk concerning the duties of married life. I tried to get him to speak of my case.

"Yes, Monsieur, every evening my

husband went to see that Henriette de Conti on the rue Bassano."

He interrupted me:

"Every evening! Every evening! Why, your husband's a superb man, positively admirable! And not without some affection for his wife, too, eh? Superb! Superb!"

He pirouetted about, came and kissed my hand, chucked me under the chin, and gave me a smile that was both paternal and rakish. He wearied me dreadfully, yet I did not dare snub him. Finally, after nearly an hour of these antics, he sat down.

"Come and sit near me, my child."

I obeyed. He took hold of my hands and began a little sermon. "My dear child," he said, "divorce, you know, is a very serious thing. To be left alone in the world—without a protector. (Here he slipped his fingers in my sleeve.) It's only a tri-

fling misunderstanding. You can't make me believe that you have ceased to love (he kissed my elbow) your husband because he spent a few evenings in the rue Bassano. Have you forgotten all the happiness he has given you? Do you ever recall the first few days of your marriage (he put his left arm round my waist)—your honeymoon—eh? eh? What about your honeymoon?"

Wasn't it perfectly ridiculous? I was so affected by all the memories his words aroused that I let him go on with his nonsense, thinking of Paul—poor Paul! What a dear, generous, companionable, amorous husband he was! For the past seven weeks I had suffered cruelly from his absence. The idea of going back to him, of belonging to him again, came to me as I listened. The magistrate's tender tones seemed like the promise of a

new honeymoon—and, at the very thought, I let my head fall back as in a blissful trance.

“Monsieur! . . .”

I jumped up, aroused suddenly to where I was, and perfectly furious. Would you believe, my dear, that old man profited by the absent-mindedness into which I was plunged by thoughts of Paul to——? No, those law people are dreadful! M. de la Coudraie received the finest box on the ear that any man ever had.

He didn’t get angry, but, taking my hand and kissing it, said with a smile:

“Happily I am not in my judicial robes. Otherwise that blow would have cost you five years, my pretty dear.”

We parted on this, not very angry with each other; he, because the smallest amount of gallantry seemed

to suffice his quinquagesima temperament; I, because he had spoken nicely to me about Paul and had said to me what each day I wanted to say to myself, but did not dare.

"Well," asked Annette, on my return, "is the case progressing all right?"

"Let me be," I replied crossly. "You're always making mischief between me and Paul. You are the cause of our separation. Please cease talking badly about my husband, for it exasperates me."

Three days later I was summoned "en conciliation." When I got into the carriage with Annette to go to the Palais, and when, after an interminable walk along corridors and up staircases, I arrived at the "conciliations" court-room, I assure you, my dear Alice, that if my heart beat fast it was not for fear that the divorce

would be pronounced for or against me, or even that it would be pronounced at all or not. It was the idea of meeting Paul again. The ante-room was full of people of the lower class, small tradesmen, the men, for the most part, alone and melancholy-looking, sitting in the dark corners with a timid and embarrassed air; the women almost all accompanied by a mother, a relative, or an elderly friend (their Annette, I'll wager). I looked around for Paul. He was not there. All at once Annette gave me a nudge.

“There he is, the wretch! Now, be very dignified!”

I was dignified, but, all the same, I looked at the *wretch!* Ah, my dear, how handsome he looked! He seemed rather thinner, but still well dressed and fascinating-looking, with violets in his buttonhole and gloves

of the latest shade. All the other men there hardly looked worthy to brush his shoes. I thought of Darthenay, of the blond giant, of Magistrate de la Coudraie. "My husband is far nicer," I thought. I already called him "my husband" again.

Annette, meantime, was prompting me what I had to do.

"Try and be firm. They'll endeavor to reconcile you both, but if you feel the slightest weakness remember Henriette de Conti. What are you looking at?"

I was looking at Paul, who, if I may say so, was "making eyes" at me. How well I understood what that look meant—the glance of a lover rather than of a husband! It meant: "My beloved Blanche, in spite of all the misery and annoyances you are making me endure, I love you and long

to press you in my arms." And I found myself replying, also by the telegraphy of the eyes: "My dear husband, I should very much like to kiss you, but I can't, because of Annette."

"Ardeville versus Ardeville!" called out a huissier.

"Courage!" whispered my sister. "Think of Henriette de Conti, Henriette de Conti, Henriette de Conti."

She kept repeating that odious name until we reached the threshold of the court-room. My husband and the huissier entered after me.

"You may sit down," said the huissier to us. "The president and his secretary will be here presently."

And he went out, leaving us alone.

Paul sat down. I went to the window and looked into the courtyard. I had resumed my dignity. I repeated to myself in a kind of rage,

“Henriette de Conti, Henriette de Conti,” and it gave me an insane desire to go and strike my handsome, well-dressed gentleman with the boutonnière. Suddenly I hear the gentleman rising, his shoes creak on the floor, the odor of the violets comes nearer. I didn’t dare turn round nor stir. I felt that I was going to faint, to fall—and, in fact, I fell into Paul’s arms. Ah, you can say that I was undignified and cowardly if you please. I’d like to have seen you in my place.

“Good, I see the matter’s settled,” said a voice I recognized.

It was Presiding Justice de la Coudraie, who had come in quietly with his clerk. He found us both sitting close together on the bench, in a perfectly proper position, of course, but I had left one of my hands in Paul’s.

We were both slightly embarrassed and said nothing.

“ You see, my dear sir,” he went on, addressing Paul, “ there’s nothing better to bring about a reconciliation than five minutes’ tête-à-tête.”

Dear old soul! He had the delicacy to let us out by a side issue, aware that the sight of a reconciled couple usually causes smiles in the corridor. What chiefly concerned us was to escape Annette, so we didn’t dally at the law courts. We jumped like young lovers into the first cab that passed, and, quick, quick, coachman! Drive us to Paul’s apartment; drive us HOME!

That’s all very well, you’ll say, Alice dear, but what became of Annette, of Darthenay, and of Cartelier?

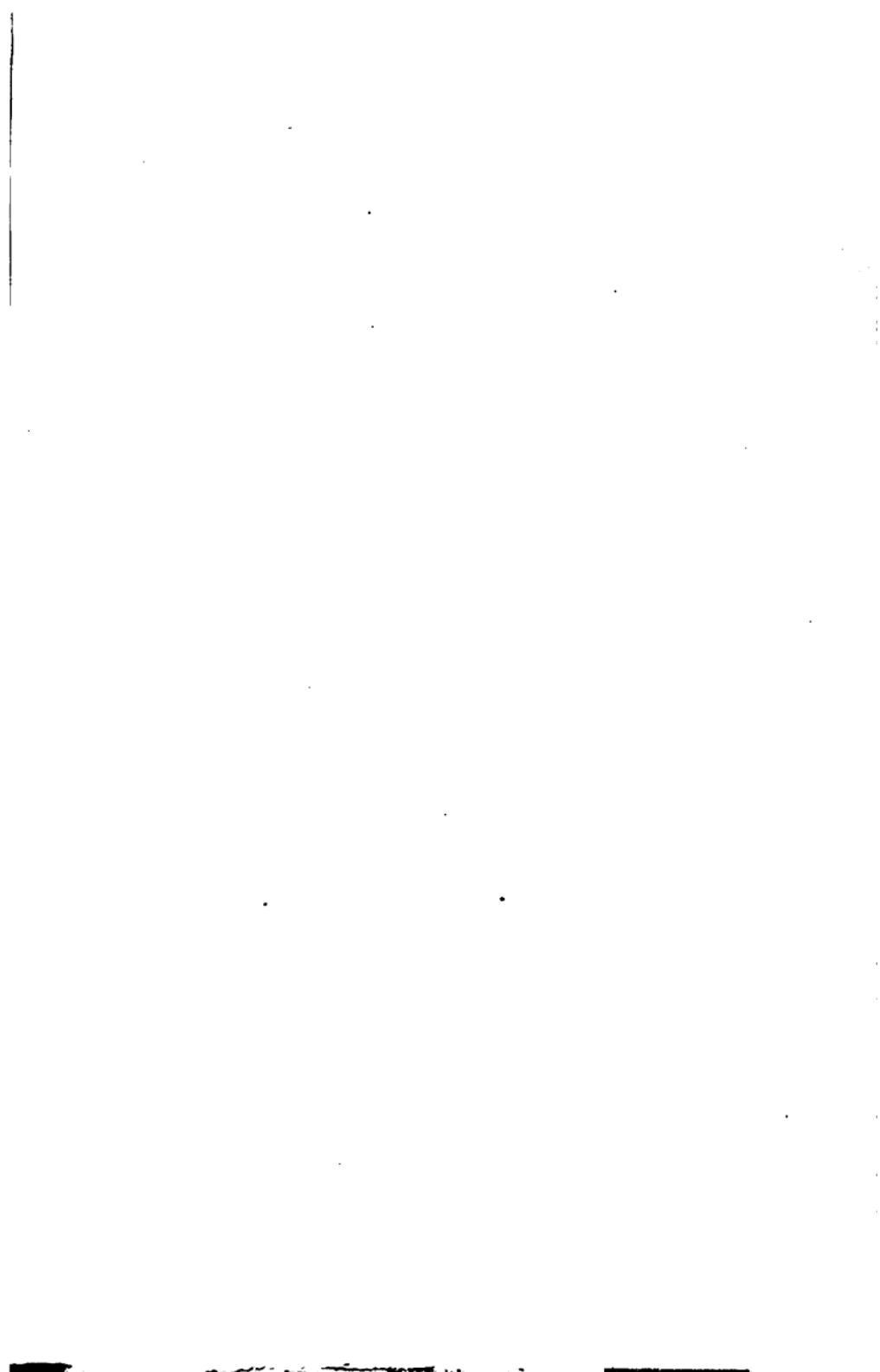
I have not seen Annette since. She did not even reply to the letter I

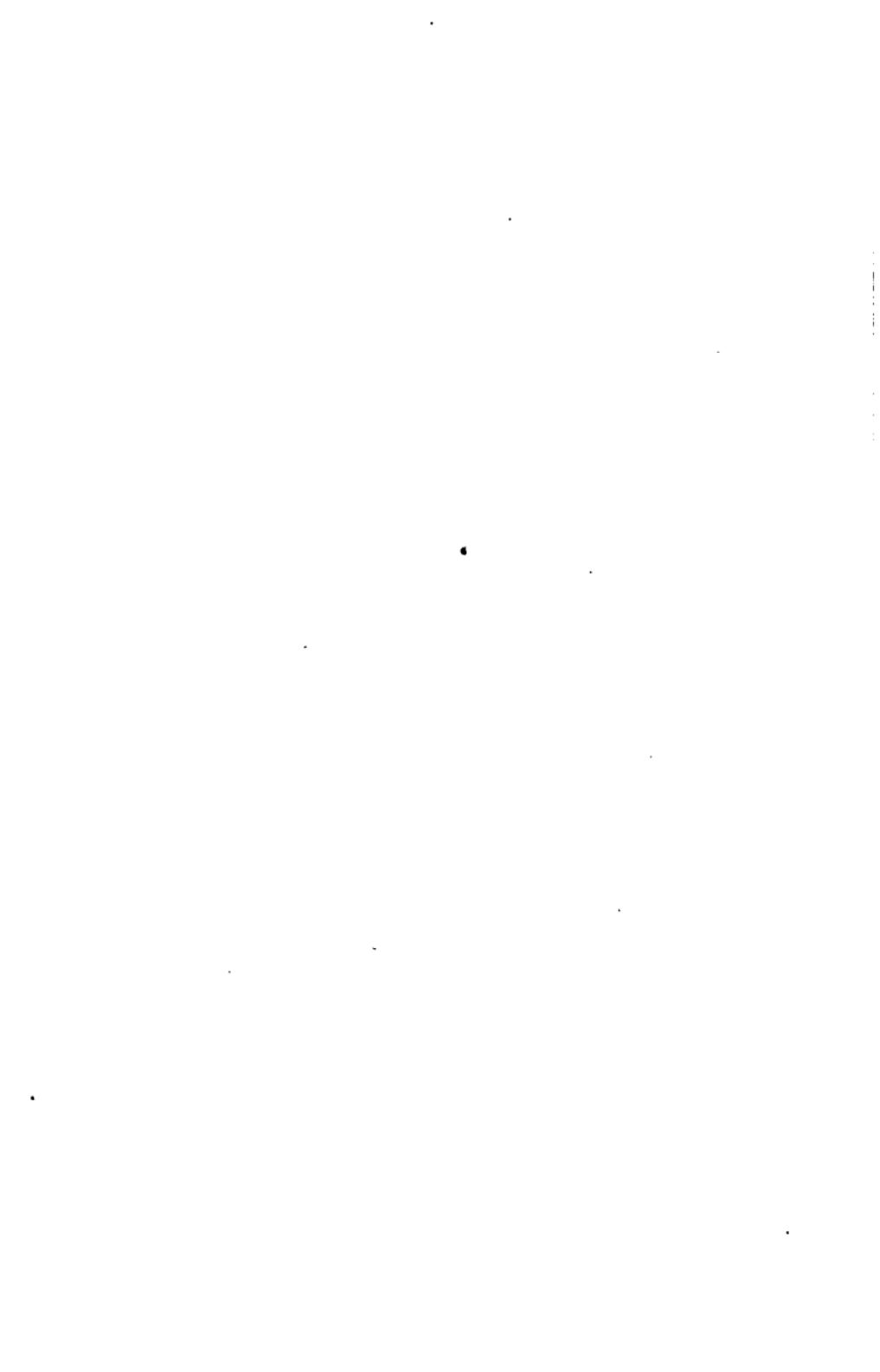
wrote in an attempt to justify myself. I am very sorry for the rupture, but I console myself with the thought that my poor sister has at last found her true vocation. She still lives in the convent in the rue de Varennes, where, I am told, she makes it her mission to encourage every one to press their divorce suits.

As to Darthenay and Cartelier—why, of course, I had to go and see them. I did not think it proper that Paul should pay their fees. But would you believe that both of them, when I called, treated me as if I belonged to them, or were a woman who would permit the greatest familiarity? I soon showed them their mistake, of course. But how completely devoid of all moral sense a man must be not to understand that a married woman is sacred, belonging exclusively to her husband from her head to her feet!

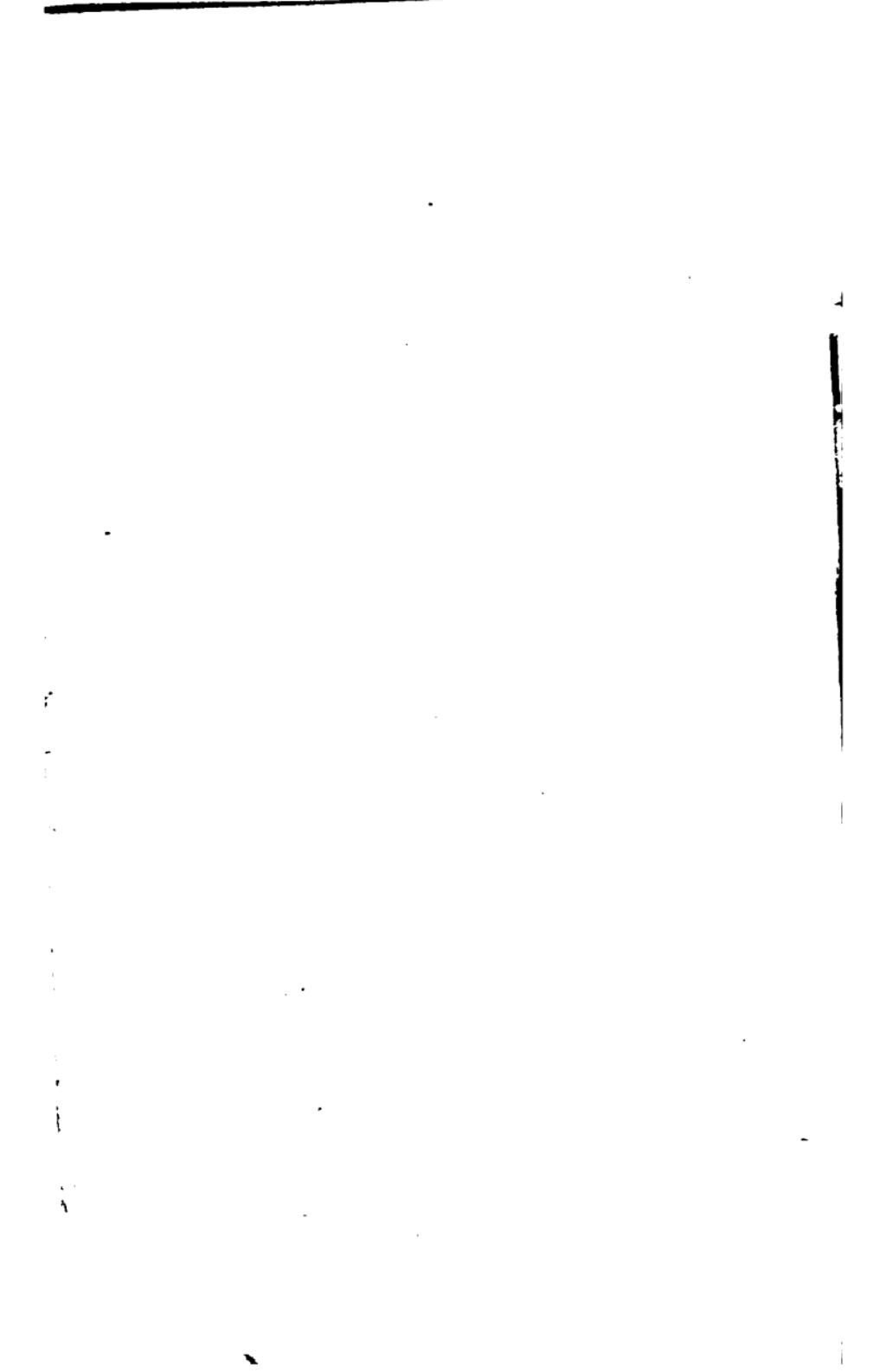
I—who pride myself on my moral sense—have resumed my wifely duties without an effort, and even with pleasure. Paul is as amorous as he was during our honeymoon—so affectionate, in fact, that I had a mind to tell him everything that happened to me during the interregnum of our married life.

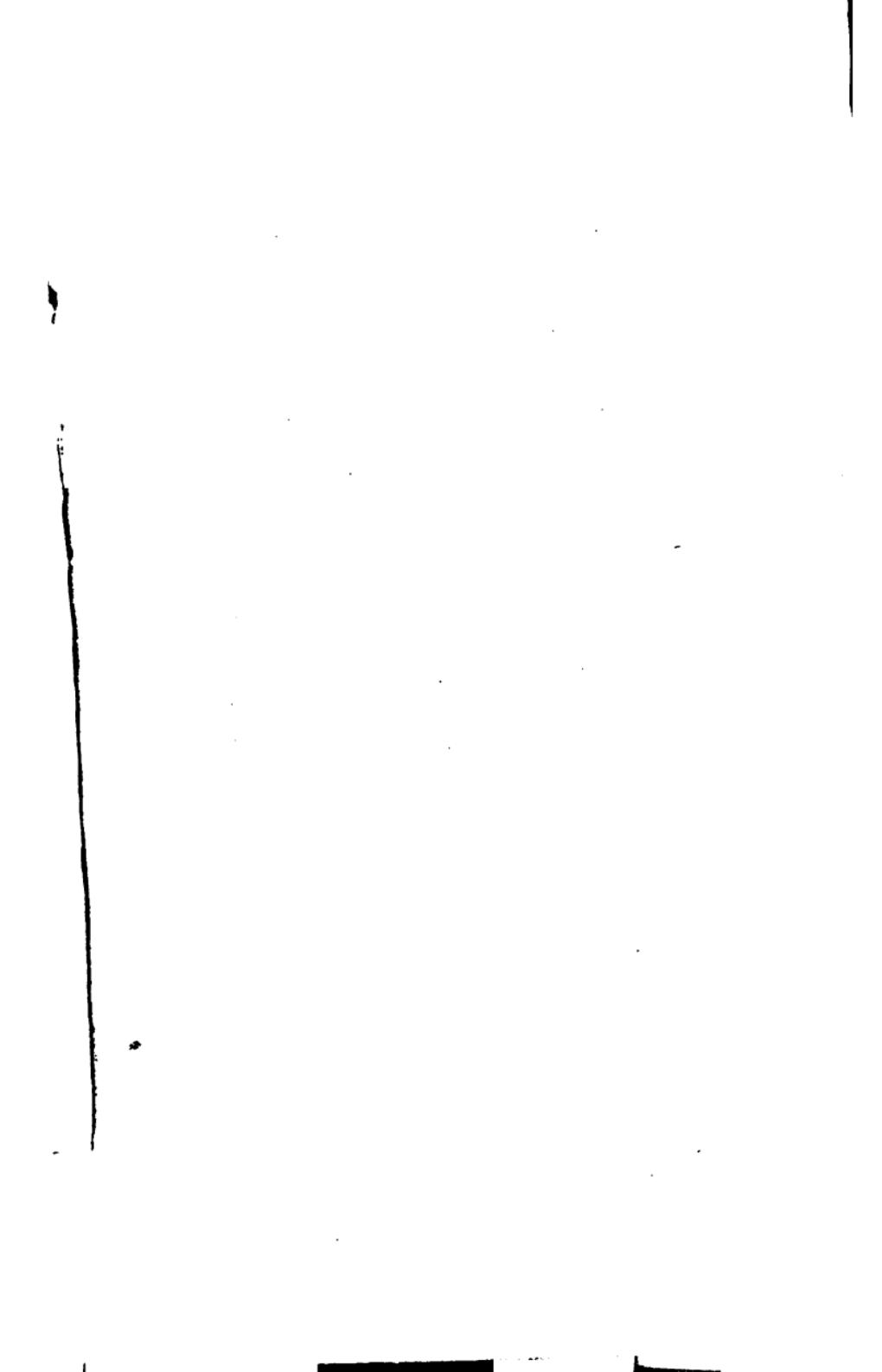
However, I held my tongue. I think I did right, don't you?











תִּתְּבִּין כְּלָמָדִים

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